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332



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THE

PULPIT COMMENTARY,

EDITED BY THE

REV. CANON H. D. M. SPENCE, M.A.,

VICAR AND RURAL DEAN OF ST. PANCRAS, AND EXAMINING CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER AND BRISTOL;

AND BY THE

REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, M.A.

WITH

INTRODUCTIONS

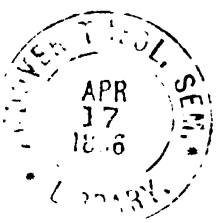
BY THE

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JEREMIAH.

Exposition

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Homiletics

By REV. W. F. ADENEY, M.A.

Homilies by Various Authors.

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THE

BOOK OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXX.

THIS and the three next chapters form a kind of book in themselves, which contrasts admirably with ch. xxvii.—xxix. In the latter Jeremiah aimed at casting down the delusive hope that the time of trial would soon be over and the captives restored; here he assumes that all are aware of the sad reality, and concentrates himself on the happier topics of comfort and encouragement. Ch. xxx. and xxxi. shine out among all Jeremiah's prophecies; there is a combination of softness and vigour which, even from a purely literary point of view, is most attractive. Strictly speaking, they ought to form but one chapter; they represent (as ver. 4 states) the revelation from Jehovah "concerning Israel and concerning Judah." It is, indeed, most touching, this yearning of the inspired prophet for the reunion of the two branches of the nation (comp. ch. iii. 1—iv. 2). A "union in spirit" was not enough for him; there must be a visible drawing together, to prove to all men that, as God is one, so his people is one. God's love is imperishable, and his election of Israel cannot be reversed. The very extent of Israel's misery is a pledge that her God will not leave her to herself too long. And how is the restoration of Israel to be conceived? Surely nothing less than a new covenant will satisfy the conditions of the problem—a new covenant written in the heart. Something akin to this encouraging prophecy may be traced here and there in earlier chapters (see ch. iii. 14—19; xvi. 14, 15; xxiii. 3—8; but here the prophet is entirely absorbed in that glorious future which could alone save him from utter despondency.

Ver. 2.—**Write thee all the words . . . in a book.** The form of expression leaves it doubtful whether a summary of all Jeremiah's previous discourses is intended, or merely of the promises concerning Israel and Judah which he had just received. There are, no doubt, numerous allusions to preceding chapters, but ver. 5 seems rather to favour the latter view. The word rendered "book" will equally suit a short discourse like the present (comp. ch. li. 60) and a large collection of prophecies as in ch. xxxvi. 2. Observe, the discourse was to be written down at once, without having been delivered orally; it was to be laid up as a pledge that God would interpose for his people (comp. Isa. xxx. 8; Hab. ii. 2, 3).

Vers. 5—11.—The great judgment of Israel's deliverance. It is nothing less than the "day of Jehovah" which the prophet sees in spirit—a day which is "great" (ver. 7; comp. Joel ii. 11; Zeph. i. 14) and terrible (vers. 5, 6; comp. Amos v. 18, 20; Isa. xiii. 6; Joel ii. 1, 11) for Israel, a day of "trouble" (ver. 7), but for his enemies of destruction.

Ver. 5.—**A voice of trembling**; rather, *a sound of trembling*, a sound causing men to tremble; doubtless it is "the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war" (ch. iv. 19). **Of fear, and not of peace**; rather, *there is fear, and no peace*. "Peace," as usual, means the harmony of a well-ordered, secure, and peaceful community. Literally, it is *wholeness*; its opposite is "breaking," *i.e.* outward ruin and inward anguish.

Ver. 6.—**Whether a man doth travail with child.** Great, indeed, must be the terror when no adequate figure suggests itself but

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that of a woman in her pangs (comp. ch. vi. 24; xiii. 21; xxii. 23; Isa. xiii. 8). **All faces are turned into paleness.** So Joel (ii. 6) and Nahum (ii. 10), "All faces withdraw their colour." For "paleness" the Septuagint has "jaundice"—a possible meaning of the Hebrew; comp. χλωρὸς, "pale, bilious-looking" in medical writings, but properly "greenish-yellow," like the Hebrew noun.

Ver. 7.—**That day**; *i.e.* "the day of Jehovah," the day of the great judgment upon the world, of which the fall of Babylon is regarded as the opening scene. **It is even the time of Jacob's trouble**; rather, *and a time of distress shall it be (even) to Jacob.*

Ver. 8.—**His yoke.** Not that imposed by the enemy (as Isa. x. 22 and xiv. 25 might suggest), but that suffered by Jacob. This is clear from the last clause of the verse.

Ver. 9.—**David their king**; viz. the "righteous Branch" or "Plant" of ch. xxiii. 5.

Vers. 10, 11.—**Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob**, etc. These two verses, omitted in the Septuagint, are among the passages which Hitzig (carrying out an idea of Movers) attributes to the editorial hand of the author (a pious Jew of the Captivity, according to him) of Isa. xl.—lxvi., and it cannot be denied that the tone and phraseology of ver. 10 is more akin to that of Isa. xl.—lxvi. than to those of the greater part of Jeremiah. Graf, in controverting Hitzig's view, points out, however, that the expressions referred to by Hitzig as "Deutero-Isaianic," are also found in other books besides the latter part of Isaiah, and that, on the other hand, "the expressions of ver. 11 are all as foreign to Isa. xl.—lxvi. as they are current in Jeremiah." As for the expression, "my servant Jacob" (which only occurs again in Jeremiah in the duplicate of this passage, ch. xlvi. 27, 28, and which is specially characteristic of the second part of Isaiah), it is worth noticing that it is found once in the Book of Ezekiel (xxxvii. 25), which, on Hitzig's theory, was written before the so-called Second Isaiah. It still remains for the student to consider whether these two verses are not an insertion by some later hand (without attempting to discover whose that hand was). That the prophetic writings have received additions from editors and scribes is a fact which cannot reasonably be gainsaid, supported as it is by the phenomena of the historical books. It would be very natural for a pious Jew in the Captivity, not wholly devoid himself of the spirit of prophecy, to encourage his people, in the Name of the Lord, with this glowing word of promise.

Ver. 11.—**In measure**; rather, *according to what is just*; i.e. not capriciously, to satisfy a feeling of revenge such as the untaught mind is apt to ascribe to God (see on ch. x. 24). **And will not**, etc.; rather, *for I cannot.*

Vers. 12—17.—Miserable indeed is the condition of Israel! No wonder; for its sins were great. And yet, just because it is so forlorn, Jehovah will interpose for its relief.

Ver. 12.—**For thus saith**, etc. If the two preceding verses are a later insertion, we must render, *But surely* (more strictly, *surely*, but particles of asseveration easily acquire an adversative force from the context). Bright, indeed, is the prospect for Judah, "but surely" his present condition is very much the reverse; comp. Isa. ix. 1 (Authorized Version, "nevertheless"). **Thy bruise is incurable**, etc. One of Jeremiah's characteristic repetitions (see ch. x. 19; xiv. 17; xv. 18). **That thou mayest be bound up.** This rendering follows the accents. But the mixture of figures is very incongruous. It is much better to connect the words a little differently and to render, *for thy sore thou hast no medicines (nor any) plaster.*

Ver. 14.—**All thy lovers**; *i.e.* the peoples confederate with thee (as ch. xxii. 20).

Ver. 16.—**Therefore**; *i.e.* because of the extremity of thy need. Comp. Isa. x. 23, 24, "The Lord Jehovah Sabáoth shall make a consumption. . . . Therefore be not afraid of Assyria;" and Isa. xxx. 17, 18, "At the rebuke of five shall ye flee. . . . And therefore will Jehovah wait, that he may be gracious unto you."

Ver. 17.—**Restore health**; rather, *apply a bandage.* **They called thee an Outcast.** Jehovah, speaking after the manner of men, cannot bear to hear his enemies, as they pass along, scornfully denominating the holy city an Outcast.

Vers. 18—22.—A picture of the regenerate commonwealth of Israel.

Ver. 18.—**Upon her own heap**; rather, *upon her own mound*, the *tell* or eminence on which an Eastern town was built (comp. Josh. xi. 13, where "in their strength" should rather be "on their own mound"). **Shall remain**; rather, *shall be inhabited.*

Ver. 19.—(Comp. this verse with ch. xxxiii. 11.) **Out of them**; *i.e.* out of city and palace. **They shall not be few**; rather, *not be diminished.* **They shall not be small**; rather, *not be lightly regarded.*

Ver. 20.—**Their children**; rather, *his children*; i.e. the "children of Israel."

Ver. 21.—The future rulers of Israel shall be of the native stock, not foreign tyrants. **Their nobles**; rather, *his noble one*, a synonym for "his ruler," *i.e.* the (earthly) king of Israel. It is remarkable that no reference is made here to the Messiah, who, in fact, is not as conspicuous a figure in the prophecies of Jeremiah as in those of Isaiah. And yet even in Isaiah there is one

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striking prophecy in which the inspired seer uses language not (in the hands of a literalist) reconcilable with the prospect of the personal Messiah. The Messiah appears, as it were, in a lightning flash, and then disappears for a time. The prophecy of Isaiah referred to is Isa. xxxii. 1, 2 (comp. ch. xxxiii. 17), in which the prospect of a truly God-fearing king, with princes of the same high character, entirely occupies the mind of the writer. "Nothing indicates that the Messiah is intended; king and princes are placed quite on a level, in accordance with the actual state of things under the so-called monarchy." **And I will cause him to draw near.** It is doubtful whether Israel or Israel's ruler is referred to. A priestly relation (such as "drawing near" implies, see Numb. xvi. 5) might be predicated of either, at any rate in the regenerate form of the Israelitish commonwealth; but it is more natural to suppose the ruler to be here indicated, for it is scarcely descriptive enough to say that he shall belong to the chosen people. **Who is this that engaged his heart;** rather, *that pledgeth his heart* (or, *courage*); i.e. that ventureth. The rejection of the old line of Davidic kings might well raise the thought that the intimate relation between Jehovah and his earthly representative for Israel, promised of old to David (2 Sam. vii.), could no longer be hoped for. But with this renewed promise the kings of the new Davidic line may venture to "draw near;" otherwise—who is he *that ventureth*?

Ver. 22.—This verse is omitted in the Septuagint, and (unless the existence of later insertions is denied altogether) is all but certainly due to a later hand (comp. ch. vii. 23). Comp. on vers. 10, 11.

Vers. 23, 24.—These verses occur in a form evidently more original in ch. xxiii. 19, 20. In all probability they were first inserted from memory in the margin, and then incorporated into the text at a time subsequent (how long subsequent we cannot say) to Jeremiah.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 2.—"*Scripture—the written Word of God.*" Jeremiah was required to write his prophecy in a book. Israel had received the Law first by a voice of thunder, but the voice was followed by the writing on the tables of stone (Exod. xxxiv. 1). St. John was commanded to write his vision in a book (Rev. i. 11). Without definite commands of this character, prophets and apostles, historians and evangelists, have committed to writing what they knew and taught. Thus we have a written revelation, a Bible. We may see the great value of this without becoming guilty of bibliolatry, or lowering our spiritual conceptions to slavish subservience to the "letter that killeth."

I. CONSIDER THE VALUE OF SCRIPTURE, AS CONTAINING THE WORD OF GOD IN WRITING. 1. *Accuracy.* Words may be spoken in haste, under excitement; a book is presumably considered and reconsidered, its words weighed and measured. "Writing makes an exact man" (Bacon). 2. *Permanence.* The spoken word may soon be forgotten, or it may be recollected imperfectly with unconscious embellishments and deficiencies. The written word can be studied carefully and at leisure. 3. *Publicity.* The spoken word is heard only by one audience, present in one place, at one time. The written word is capable of being spread over a wider area. If but one copy is written, this can be sent about and frequently re-read to various hearers, like the circular letters of the New Testament. But the book can be copied, and thus the area of its influence enlarged. Since the invention of printing, and with the facilities for multiplying and cheapening the production of books, this extensive influence of literature beyond that of speech has been immensely increased. 4. *Transmission to the future.* The spoken word dies with the breath that utters it; the written word can be treasured for ages, and transmitted to distant generations. The orator is peculiarly a man of his own age; the literary genius belongs to all time. If the Divine Word had been handed down only by tradition we know how terribly it must have been corrupted. We in these later days can enjoy its fresh power because it is crystallized in literature, because prophecy has become Scripture.

II. CONSIDER THE WAY IN WHICH WE SHOULD DEAL WITH SCRIPTURE THAT CONTAINS THE WORD OF GOD. Several duties and wise courses of action are suggested by the fact that the Word of God is written in a book, viz.: 1. *Care to preserve the purity of the text.* Correct readings and accurate renderings of this are of first importance, since they guard the thoughts of God from perversion. 2. *Reverence for the authority of Scripture.* If we believe that it embodies the words and ideas of God, we shall feel that, even

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when it teaches spiritual principles which we cannot as yet see well established, it has a claim to be listened to with the reverence of the ignorant pupil for his wiser master. As far as it brings before us God's thoughts, it must be read and examined and estimated by quite a different standard from that by which we decide questions of purely human literature. 3. *Diligence in searching the Scriptures.* The Bible is to be used. It is not to be treated as many men treat the classics, "without which no gentleman's library can be complete," but as a text-book, a book of daily reference. It must also be inquired into. There are mines of spiritual wealth to dig, things new as well as things old that a well-furnished scribe can bring out of it. There is in it "milk for babes, and meat for strong men," and the latter needs to be "read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested," if we would profit by it. 4. *Care to extract the spiritual thought from the visible letter.* The letter is human, the form of speech is human. It is the spiritual idea that is Divine, and this is the most important thing to us. This is the real and eternal truth, the Word of life and power. We need an inspiration ourselves to help us to peel off the husk of speech, and find the precious kernel of Divine thought beneath.

Vers. 10, 11.—"*Fear not.*" I. WHY ISRAEL MIGHT FEAR. For various reasons, viz.: 1. *Present trouble.* Already some had been led into exile. What was thus experienced seemed to presage future and worse distress. Grief tends to despondency. In disappointment we are ready to think that all things must grow worse and worse. 2. *The anticipation of necessary punishment.* This is confirmed in the prophetic message—"for I cannot leave thee altogether unpunished." Guilt is the parent of fear. "Conscience makes cowards of us all." 3. *Incurable wretchedness.* (Ver. 12.) Left to themselves, the people were in a hopeless condition. (1) They could not cure their moral disease; Josiah's abortive reformation was a proof of this. (2) They could not cure their external distress; it was vain to attempt to break the yoke of great Babylon. 4. *Solitude.* "All thy lovers have forgotten thee" (ver. 14). In the hour of trial boon companions fall away and leave their wretched comrade forlorn and helpless. The soul must face its darkest trouble alone. While society dispels fear, the silence and desertion of loneliness provoke it. It is not surprising, therefore, that with so many concurrent incentives to fear Israel should be overwhelmed with it, nor is it surprising that similar causes should produce a similar effect among us. Yet it is not the less deplorable. Fear is an evil. It is distressing beyond measure. The vague and threatening spectres of horror that haunt the imagination of the soul when it is a slave to fear may be far more painful than the real evils of which they are the magnified shadows. But fear is injurious as well as painful. It paralyzes effort, dissuades from dangerous tasks of duty, drives to rash and foolish resorts for escape. It is important to see if so sad and injurious a condition can be avoided.

II. WHY ISRAEL SHOULD NOT FEAR. For various reasons, viz.: 1. *The security of God's service.* Israel was God's servant. It is reasonable to suppose that God will protect and save those whom he honours with his name and calls to his work. 2. *The promise of ultimate deliverance.* "Lo, I will save thee from afar," etc. Fear may threaten now, but rest and quietude will come in the future. Fear must be overcome by hope, the darkness of the near future triumphed over by the exceeding brightness of the greater future. We shall not fear what the world can do against us when we live in the hope of what eternity will do for us. Looking at ourselves, we see our wounds incurable, and we despair; looking at the good Physician, we see the promise of health, and we hope. 3. The assurance of the *presence of God.* "For I am with thee." Thus Abraham was not to fear because God was his "Shield, and exceeding great Reward" (Gen. xv. 1); and David could say, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Ps. xxiii. 4). When hope fails faith may yet be strong. Better than the vision of the future haven far over the waves are the strong hand and sure eye of the pilot with us in the storm. When the hope of heaven fails faith in God may still sustain us. 4. A knowledge of the *limitation and good purpose of suffering.* This is (1) given to correct, either as chastisement for sin, or as pruning to make the fruit-bearing branch more fruitful; and (2) given only in just measure, not beyond desert, requirement, or endurance. If we have these reasonable thoughts about our troubles they will

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not be able to conjure up the terrors of illimitable distress which they naturally inspire when we do not see that they are controlled by purposes of Divine goodness.

Ver. 17.—*Divine healing.* I. GOD IS THE GREAT HEALER OF HIS PEOPLE. 1. God is *not satisfied* to leave his people unhelped in sin and wretchedness. We may grow accustomed to the evil of the world till we pass it unheeded. But it is not so with the Father of us all. He cannot endure the perpetual continuance of the wretchedness we accept (for others) with so little concern. 2. God *designs to restore* his people. It would seem easier to destroy the old weary world and create a new world, than to redeem and restore that which is so abandoned. But it is the glory of the gospel that it seeks and saves the lost. 3. The restoration of God's people can only be effected through the *healing* of them. Israel cannot be restored to the Holy Land until the people are healed of their unholiness, and restored to God spiritually. Men are too ready to regard redemption externally as a change of state, a deliverance from distress and ruin, a gift of blessings, heaven, etc. It is all this, but not primarily. In the first and chief place redemption is healing, is not a change of circumstances, but a change in the soul itself. The richest possessions are of little use to the sick man. The sick body needs health, not wealth; and the sick soul needs healing before all external changes of condition. 4. It is a great thing to see the *source* of this healing in God. No soul can cure itself. No man can heal his fellow. The disease is naturally incurable (ver. 12). It is healed only by God and through a miracle. The miracles of Christ are thus visible parables of his great work of redemption. The good Physician saves men's souls by working miracles of spiritual healing upon them.

II. THE GREATNESS OF HIS PEOPLE'S DISTRESS INCLINES GOD TO HEAL THEM. Because Israel is called "an Outcast," God interferes to save him. David prays that God will pardon his iniquity, "*for* it is great" (Ps. xxv. 11). We feel that our sin is so great that we dare not ask for forgiveness, our wretchedness so abject that it is useless to seek for deliverance. But we may reverse the argument. The greater the sin the more does it need forgiveness, the deeper the misery the more loudly does it call for help. As claims of merit we have nothing. But when we look for pleas for mercy we find that the very bitterness of distress creates them. As the Judge, God cannot be invoked to help the sinner; as the Healer, he is most ready to come in the deepest need. The reasons for this are apparent. 1. The *love* of God. Love is moved by need rather than by desert. If God loves his children he will be most ready to help in their sorest distress. 2. The *honour* of God. The people who were called by the Name of God were also called "outcasts." Here was a reproach on the great Name of their God. For his Name's sake God saves. 3. The special *design of redemption.* The physician finds his vocation in the healing art. Sickness is a call for the exercise of special functions. The worse the patient is, the more may he expect of the physician's care and attention. "They that are whole need not the physician." He is the helper of the sick. Therefore the very greatness of a man's sin and wretchedness, instead of discouraging his faith, should encourage him to seek Christ. They who are in such circumstances may know that they are the very persons Christ chiefly seeks to help.

Vers. 18—21.—*Joys of redemption.* The joys of the restoration of Israel are suggestive of the joys of redemption which belong to those who have been healed of their sins and recovered to the favour of God. Let us consider some of the elements of these joys.

I. A RESTORATION TO LOST RIGHTS AND POSSESSIONS. The city is to be built again "upon her own mound." The people not only find the vines they grow in Chaldea fruitful; they are restored to their own land. The prodigal would not have been satisfied if his comrades had helped him to affluence and pleasure again; he must return to the old home. There is something imperfect in the return of prosperity to Job in the fact that though he has greater riches and as many sons and daughters as before his calamities, his dead children are not raised from the grave, and the loss of them cannot be really compensated by the gift of a new family. So is it with earthly losses. The greatest are irretrievable. But the glory of God's ultimate salvation is that it restores old lost blessings as well as gives new blessings, both comforting memory and satisfying hope.

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II. AN ENJOYMENT OF INWARD GLADNESS AND THANKSGIVING. The true life is the inner life. Outward sunshine may find this black as midnight, and leave it so. It is much, therefore, to know that redemption from sin brings real gladness. We might have thought that it would have been haunted with dark memories. But God's deliverance is so complete that it dispels the gloom of a guilty conscience. The Christian should, therefore, be a man of inward joys and thankfulness.

III. AN EXTENSION OF POWER AND GLORY. The exiles were scattered and their wealth and influence lost; the return at first promised little satisfaction to the poor and feeble band of patriots that attempted to rebuild the ruins of the ancient nation. But great promises encouraged the faithful to believe that ultimately their numbers would be multiplied, that they should have glory, and not "be lightly regarded," and should be ruled by men of their own people of noble and royal orders. The Christian Church began, like restored Israel, in a small and humble sphere. But she has grown marvellously, and is destined to grow in numbers, in power, and in glory. Redemption is a work worthy of God; no meagre saving of a few as "by the skin of their teeth," but a work of right royal magnificence, calling multitudes to its blessings, and giving them liberty and honour for their old shame and bondage. The Christian receives more than salvation; he is an heir of glory.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Written in a book; or, words held over.* The portion of these prophecies here referred to (probably ch. xxx., xxxi.) contains the most tender expressions of the Divine love. It is full of revelations of the deep unalterable affection and gracious purpose of God for his people, even when they were as yet unrepentant. They are regarded in it as sorrowing for their sin, and returning spiritually to him who restored them to their land. Now, many of these statements it would have been inexpedient for the exiles to hear, whilst as yet they showed no sign of contrition. The prophet is therefore bidden to write them in a book, that they may be read at the fitting season. The words of Christ, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now," are strikingly parallel. This command impresses us with—

I. THE FULNESS OF THE DIVINE WORD. It is not one communication but many, and under circumstances of the utmost conceivable variety. Not in one book but many—a library, representing every stage of human history and spiritual progress. No age or exigency of human nature has found God silent. How great is the multitude of his messages! How many words have been spoken and acted that have not been recorded (cf. John xxi. 25)! The written book is like a vessel let down into the great ocean of the unwritten words and deeds of the Eternal.

II. GOD'S CARE AND ADAPTATION WITH RESPECT TO IT. This prophecy was to be preserved in a book, that no portion of it should be allowed to perish until its fitting time should arrive. The words it contained were all precious, and of pregnant significance in the future of the Church and the world. The adaptation of the prophecy is not less striking. It would not bear public announcement at the time of its communication to the prophet, and it might have imperilled his life; but it occurred then in the natural order of God's thought and purpose; by-and-by the people would be in a better mood and frame to consider it; therefore it was held over. It is written in a book that it may present a faithful transcript of the Divine thought. The progress of revelation has been slow; but that is not the fault of the Revealer, but the necessity imposed by the conditions of human progress. "In the *fulness of the time* God sent forth his Son" (Gal. iv. 4; cf. 1 Pet. i. 20).

III. THE REASONS THERE MAY BE FOR THE DARK DISPENSATIONS OF PROVIDENCE. Who in these stern times could tell the depth of the tenderness of God? It is necessary on such occasions to appeal to the fears of transgressors. The most awful calamities that befall the Church and the individual Christian are inflicted in love; but that love cannot express itself until the requirements of righteousness have been satisfied. The soul that is afflicted ought, therefore, to submit itself to the mighty hand of God, and wait patiently for light. The best wine is kept to the last; the gospel interprets all antecedent revelations.

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IV. THE INFINITE RICHES OF REVELATION THAT AWAIT THE SPIRITUAL MATURITY OF THE SAINTS. There are educative, wayfaring truths; and there are truths at which we are to arrive in the end of our growth and pilgrimage. Truth is not only prospective but reflective; not only directive to the feet of the Christian, but revealing the mind and heart of God. How much is held over until these earthly days are ended (cf. 1 Cor. xiii. 12)?—M.

Ver. 16.—*The twofold wonder of Israel's salvation.* I. THE PUNISHMENT OF ITS ENEMIES. 1. *Because of their strength.* The enemies of Israel, especially Babylon, were very strong. But they contained within themselves the elements of their own destruction. It is a property of the *world*, in all its aspects, to appear strong and real and stable. This illusion must be dissipated in order to the free spiritual development of God's children; therefore Christ has said, "Be not afraid; I have overcome the world." How many and how great have been the foes of the Church, and the individual saint! yet has God reduced them to nothingness. 2. *Because of the manner of their punishment.* Evidently more than one nation is referred to here, and they are dealt with in sovereign authority. "The nations are but as a drop in a bucket." (1) Their guilt towards Israel determines the measure of their requital. The Church is the centre and pivot of the world's destiny. In it and for its sake the world is judged (cf. Matt. xxv. 40, 45). (2) The degrees of punishment will correspond to the guilt. Even in vast concerns and through long time God observes an exact and equitable rule of award.

II. ITS OWN RECOVERY. This was to be not only partial but complete, and was to be a terror to the onlooking nations. 1. *Nothing could be more unlikely at the time this was spoken.* This was a part of the wonder of God's saving power, and a vindication of his agency. 2. *That which men despised and neglected God raised up.* He thereby proved the freedom of his grace, and demonstrated the impossibility of salvation by works. The matchless condescension and infinite love of God were proved in this, that Zion deservedly rejected is nevertheless restored. The power was of God. Nothing is so abject as a spiritual organism without the Spirit of God; nothing is so glorious or sufficient when the Spirit of God is present. 3. *The historic accomplishment of this was to be outdone by the spiritual.* Evidently the reference is through the immediately impending event to the spiritual future of the Messiah. God's goodness has ever some higher possibility sheathed in its first expressions. The imperfect efforts of Nehemiah and his colleagues but shadow forth the achievements of the cross. The new Israel will be incomparably more holy, powerful, and blessed than the old. Daily are the miracles of his saving mercy being performed; "the chief of sinners," the fallen, the outcast, are being welcomed into the company of the redeemed and regenerate.—M.

Vers. 18—22.—*The multitude of God's mercies.* A rapid and brilliant enumeration of the characteristics of national glory and human happiness and well-being. Representative and suggestive, but not exhaustive.

I. SEVERALLY SPECIFIED. Set forth with great distinctness, as one might in a legal document; and yet a complete and comprehensive view of a nation's restoration. 1. *Return of the people to their own land.* (Ver. 18.) The representatives of those who had been exiled would be brought back. The shifty and uncertain character of their sojourning ("tents") in a strange land would be exchanged for a settled, civic life. As an outward symbol of this Jerusalem would be rebuilt upon its ruins. "He that made of the city a heap (Isa. xxv. 1) can when he pleaseth make of a heap a city again" (Henry). The habits and customs, the public order and life of God's people, are important as being sacred even as their specially religious observances, and are therefore cared for. True religion is not merely to sojourn in the world, but to dwell there, and influence permanently the conditions and usages of human life. Nothing less than the reconstitution of human society is herein sought (cf. John xvii. 15). 2. *Restoration of religious institutions.* (Vers. 18—20.) Of these the chief, centre, and condition of all the rest—the temple, or "palace"—is first referred to. From its conspicuous and characteristic position amongst the public buildings of the city, it is mentioned in connection with its rebuilding. Because of its presence therein the latter is also

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sacred; and so it is said, "Out of *them* shall proceed," etc. The great festivals are to be restored. Worship, in its most imposing and joyous forms, will be celebrated; and this supposes for its possibility the presence in Israel of a religious, self-governing community. The spiritual training of the people will be resumed (ver. 20). Much attention was always devoted by pious Jews to the upbringing of their children, who are here promised to be "as aforetime," *i.e.* as Jewish children were wont to be according to the covenant, strictly and piously brought up. In this a fresh security is afforded of the religious and social prosperity of God's people. The Church can never afford to ignore the upbringing of the children. As it is a positive injunction ("Feed my lambs"), so is it a gracious privilege and favour granted to his servants that they should discharge it. The sunniest and most hopeful department of religious effort is that which relates to the young. "How is it your flowers are so grandly developed?" was asked of a gardener. "Chiefly," he replied, "because I take care of my seedlings." The sacred community of Israel will also thereby be increased and established. New, trained members will be supplied for the spiritual offices, and the ordinary membership of the congregation. It is observable that the chief increase of the Church is thus implied to be from within itself. And so it must be to-day. 3. *National prosperity.* This appears in the first place as social well-being. The family life will be greatly blessed, and the population multiplied. It is a result of moral order, etc., and also a means of securing and extending the influence of righteousness. In the next place is political freedom. Tyranny will be abolished (ver. 20); and their ruler shall be one of themselves, representing their aims and aspirations, and not imposed upon them by a foreign conqueror. Lastly, political influence will extend abroad (ver. 19). 4. *Covenant relations will be renewed.* (Ver. 22.) This is the culminating and all-comprehensive blessing. Whilst the preceding suppose this, they are really but as antecedents to its complete realization. God will then recognize his people, and regard them with complacency. Neither will be ashamed of the other.

II. MUTUALLY RELATED. How essential is it that human life, in its interests and activities, should be regarded as a whole, the secular with the religious, the duty with the right, the responsibility with the privilege! It is a distinct loss when one portion of it is taken apart from the others and concentrates attention upon itself. Here we have a grand ideal for the individual and the community: the life of man, to be complete and healthy in its development, must extend indefinitely outwards and upwards. The deepest reverence for truth, righteousness, and God is consistent with the truest liberty. The blessings and good things of life, to be truly enjoyed, must be received as sacramental; as the outcome and expression of communion between man and God.—M.

Ver. 21.—*The ideal ruler.* The immediate reference is to Zerubbabel and the elders who returned from the Captivity; but there is a larger significance than any merely human personage could exhaust or satisfactorily correspond to. There can be no doubt as to the Messianic character of this promise. But it is precisely the vagueness of the reference, the primary uncertainty as to who it was to be in whom all the hope of Israel was to be realized, that constituted the moral force of the prediction. In Israel was the secular government to be identified with and crowned by the moral and spiritual; but to the very last was it kept in reserve as to whether or not the kingdom thus foretold was to be of this world. Jesus Christ had himself to declare the real essence and nature of his kingdom. He constituted the ideal Ruler of Israel—

I. IN HIS RELATION TO HIS SUBJECTS. 1. *He was to be of the same kindred.* A stronger guarantee of the Divine favour could not be given. No foreigner was to hold permanent sway over the Israel of God. In one of themselves the holy people would find a legitimate centre for loyal attachment and patriotic devotion. That from their own midst their Prince should spring was proof that their independence, liberty, and national individuality should be preserved. He would therefore represent its honour, and secure for himself the strongest personal attachment. The hopes of the race would be embodied in such a personage, who would vitally perpetuate its glory. 2. *He was to be allied to them in their experience and sympathies.* As their fellow-countryman he will understand their aims and aspirations. By the vicissitudes of their fortune his sympathies will be drawn forth, and he will share the enthusiasm of their future. In Jesus Christ these conditions were fulfilled.

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II. IN HIS MEDIATORIAL INFLUENCE. "To draw near" is used in a priestly or mediatorial sense. Israel as a people, or as represented in its ruler, was to have this privilege conferred upon it. A Divine as well as a human qualification is therefore requisite for the perfect governor; he must not only belong to the people but he must please God. 1. *The grace of God will rest upon him and work within him.* Of Zerubbabel in the first instance, but much more of Christ, is this statement true. He was "full of grace and truth." He is the great Temple-builder and Restorer of the kingdom; and he is the Accepted of God: "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased" (Luke iii. 22). 2. *His own nature will respond to the Divine influence.* He is to be one who "engages his heart to approach unto" God. Responsibility drives him to no rash or illegitimate expedients, but to a Divine trust and a desire to please his God. In all this there is evinced the utmost freedom (cf. Matt. iv. 1; xvi. 22; Luke xii. 50; John xii. 27; Matt. xxvii. 42). 3. *The admiration and delight of God are to be called forth by him.* "Who is this," etc.? is no inquiry for the sake of information, but an expression of complacency and satisfaction. This feeling finds frequent expression in the prophets, and is noticed in the Gospels. It is for the subjects of such a King to yield themselves to his rule, and identify themselves with his priestly intercession. It should be their great desire to be in him, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. ii. 30).—M.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Vers. 1—6.—The promise of ch. xxx. 22 is expressly declared to apply to both sections of the nation. Jehovah thus solemnly declares his purpose of mercy, and dwells with special kindness on the happy future of Ephraim.

Ver. 2.—**The people which were left of the sword,** etc.; literally, *the people of those left of the sword.* The expression clearly implies that the Jews at the time spoken of had escaped, or were about to escape, in some great battle or some other kind of slaughter. Hence the "finding grace in the wilderness" cannot refer to the sequel of the passage through the Red Sea, and we must perforce explain it of the second great deliverance, viz. from the Babylonian exile. This view is strongly confirmed by ch. li. 50, where the Israelites who escape the predicted slaughter at Babylon are called "escaped ones from the sword," and exhorted to remember Jehovah and Jerusalem "afar off." The "wilderness" of the present passage, like the "afar off" of ch. li. (and of the next verse) seems to mean Babylon, which was, by comparison with the highly favoured Judah, a "barren and dry land" (comp. Ps. lxiii. 1), a spiritual Arabia. It may be objected that the tense here is the perfect; but there is abundance of analogy for explaining it as the prophetic perfect. The restoration of the chosen people to favour is as certain in the Divine counsels as if it were already an event past. (It seems less appropriate to understand "the wilderness" of the country which separated Assyria from Palestine. It was in Babylon that the covenant of Sinai was renewed to God's repentant people.) Even **Israel, when I went to cause him to rest**; rather, *when I went to cause Israel to rest* (literally, *to cause him—Israel—to rest*; but the pleonastic pronoun need not be represented in the English). Another possible and perhaps preferable rendering is, *I will go to cause,* etc. "Rest" could only be had in the consciousness of God's favour. With all the outward prosperity of many of the Jews in Babylon, there was no true "rest." Comp. ch. vi. 16, "Ask for the old paths... and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (the same verbal root in the Hebrew for "rest" in both passages).

Ver. 3.—**The Lord hath appeared of old unto me.** The Church of the faithful Israel is the speaker. "From afar" (so we ought to render, rather than "of old") she sees Jehovah, with the eye of faith, approaching to redeem her; comp. Isa. xl. 10 and lix. 20 (only that in these passages it is to Jerusalem, and not to Babylon, that Jehovah "comes" as the Redeemer); also the promise in ch. xxx. 10, "I will save thee from afar," and ch. li. 50, quoted above. (Septuagint reads "unto him;" but an abrupt change of person is not uncommon in Hebrew.) Saying, **Yea, I have loved thee,** etc. "Saying" is inserted to make the connection plainer. The genius of Hebrew does not require such a distinct indication of a change of speakers as our Western languages. For other instances of this, see Gen. iv. 25; xxvi. 7; xxxii. 31; 1 Kings xx. 34. **With loving-kindness have I drawn thee**; rather, *do I continue loving-kindness unto thee.* "To continue" is literally, *to draw out at length.* The

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idea is the same as that in the great prophecy which follows that of the suffering Saviour, "With everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee" (Isa. liv. 8; comp. ver. 10).

Ver. 4.—**I will build thee.** A nation, like a family, is frequently compared to a building (so ch. xii. 16; xxiv. 6; comp. Eph. ii. 22). **O virgin of Israel.** The people of Israel is personified as a virgin (comp. ch. xiv. 7). **Adorned with thy tabrets,** The expression will not, of course, bear to be logically criticized, for it was not the whole people who went out with "tabrets" or "timbrels," but the "damsels," who, it is true, formed an important part of religious processions (Ps. lxviii. 25), and doubtless of secular ones also (comp. Judg. xi. 34). Joyousness is an essential part of the Biblical ideal both of religion and of a normal state of society: "The joy of the Lord is your strength."

Ver. 5.—**The mountains of Samaria.** "Samaria" is used, equally with Ephraim, for the northern kingdom. **Shall eat** them **as common things**; rather, *shall enjoy the fruit.* The word, however, literally means *shall profane them.* The more common phrase, "shall eat the fruit," occurs in Isa. lxv. 21, where the same promise is given. The law was that newly planted fruit trees should be left alone for three years; that in the fourth year their fruit should be consecrated to God; and that in the fifth year their fruit might be "profaned," *i.e.* devoted to ordinary uses (comp. Deut. xx. 6; xxviii. 30).

Ver. 6.—The termination of the schism between north and south will be shown by the anxiety of the Ephraimites (see on "Samaria," ver. 5) to take part with their brethren in the festival of the new moon. It was the custom, at any rate in later times, to station watchmen at elevated points to give notice of the first appearance of "the slender sickle, which shines so brightly in the clear Oriental heaven." **Let us go up.** Not with reference to the physical elevation of Jerusalem, for the phrase, "to go up," is used of an army withdrawing from Jerusalem (ch. xxi. 2; xxxiv. 21). This seems to indicate that the term was sometimes used in a weakened sense, to which parallels might easily be given. These words, "Arise ye, and let us go up," etc., were, at a later period, the formula with which the leader of the pilgrims from any particular district summoned the members of his caravan to fall into the procession.

Vers. 7—14.—The restoration of Israel; its blessedness and joyousness.

Ver. 7.—**Sing with gladness,** etc. It is not stated who are addressed; but we may doubtless understand, from Isa. lxvi. 10, "all ye who love him," whether Jews or Gentiles. The latter, too, are interested in the restoration of Israel, because Israel is as it were a "priest" or mediator for the other nations (Isa. lxi. 6). **Among the chief of the nations**; rather, *because of the chief of the nations.* Israel is called the "chief of the nations" (so, with a cognate word for "chief," in Amos vi. 1) because Jehovah has "chosen" it as his *peculium* (to use the language of the Vulgate), Deut. vii. 6, and because no other nation "hath God so nigh unto them," and "hath statutes and judgments so righteous," as Israel (Deut. iv. 7, 8).

Ver. 8.—The weakest among the Israelites will share the blessings with the strongest, even **the blind and the lame** (comp. Isa. xxxiii. 23, "The lame take the prey"). Elsewhere we are told that, in the Messianic age, "the eyes of the blind shall see," and "the lame man shall leap as an hart" (Isa. xxxv. 5, 6). **Shall return thither**; rather, *hither;* i.e. to Palestine, where Jeremiah writes this prophecy. The word for **company** is *kahal,* the proper word in the Pentateuch for the Israelitish national "congregation."

Ver. 9.—**With weeping**; *i.e.* with a joy dashed with sorrow at the thought of the sin which has rendered such an interposition necessary (comp. ch. xxxi. 18). **Cause them to walk by the rivers of waters.** The reference here is primarily to the homeward journey of the exiles, which shall be free from the trials of the first Exodus, but not exclusively (see on next verse). The question arises how this prediction is to be reconciled with facts. For, as Kimchi has remarked, we find no reference to miracles performed for the Jews who returned from Babylon. A twofold reply seems admissible. We may say either that to those who enjoy a vivid sense of the favour and protection of God no trial is grievous, no circumstances exclude an under-current of joy (comp. Ps. xxiii.); or that the prophecy is still waiting for its complete fulfilment, Israel having still a great future reserved for it upon its recognition of the true Messiah. **In a straight way**; or, *in an even way,* i.e. one free from hindrances. Comp. Ezra's prayer (Ezra viii. 21), and Ps. cvii. 7, in both of which passages "right" should probably be "even." **Ephraim is my firstborn.** It is doubted whether this simply means that Ephraim (*i.e.* North Israel) shall be in no respect inferior to Judah—a strong form of expression being chosen, on account of the longer continuance of Ephraim's captivity; or whether it implies a restoration to the tribes of Joseph of the prerogative conferred upon the sons of Joseph (1 Chron. v. 1, 2; comp. Gen. xlviii. 15). The former view seems hardly consistent with the dignity of a prophetic writer. "Forms of expression,"

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i.e. rhetorical phrases, may be admitted in poetical passages, but hardly in solemn prophetic revelations. It was true that Judah had "prevailed above his brethren;" but the original "gift of God" to Ephraim was "without repentance." With regard to the fulfilment of this prediction, we must remember that the remnant of the northern tribes whose faith was strong enough to induce them to profit by the edict of Cyrus, was smaller than that of the southern. Hence the outward signs of God's favour to Ephraim could not be so great as they would have been had the moral conditions of the fulfilment of the promise been more fully complied with.

Ver. 10.—**The isles**; *i.e.* the distant countries of the West (see on ch. ii. 10). So great an event as the restoration of the chosen people would be of world-wide importance. **He that scattered Israel will gather him**, etc. "The Israelites were the flock of Jehovah (Ps. lxxvii. 20; lxxx. 1), but during the Captivity a scattered and miserable flock. Jeremiah says that his eye 'shall run down with tears, because the flock of Jehovah is carried away captive' (ch. xiii. 17). The change in the fortunes of the Jews is compared by the prophets to a shepherd's seeking his lost sheep, and feeding them again in green pastures (ch. xxxi. 10; l. 19; Ezek. xxxiv. 11—16). The reference is not so much to the homeward journey of the exiles as to the state of temporal and spiritual happiness in which they would find themselves on their return. The same figures occur in a psalm, where a reference to the return from exile is excluded by the pre-exile date, '. . . feed them also, and carry them for ever' (Ps. xxviii. 9)" (from the writer's note on Isa. xl. 11).

Ver. 12.—**Shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord**; *i.e.* the Ephraimites, after praising God on the holy hill, shall spread themselves over their own territory like an overflowing stream, and enjoy the "goodness" or good gifts of Jehovah—the corn (not simply the wheat), the wine, the oil, etc. (comp. Deut. viii. 8). **Sorrow**; rather, *languish*. As Dr. Payne Smith well says, "It expresses the poverty and helplessness of exiles unable from home-sickness and want of confidence to do anything with spirit. Restored to their homes, they will be as full of vigour as a garden irrigated with water under a Southern sun."

Ver. 13.—Young and old, men and women, shall give themselves up to joy and merriment, the centre of the mirth being the maidens with the timbrels (ver. 4). **Both young men and old together**; rather, *and young men and old (shall rejoice) together.*

Ver. 14.—**And I will satiate**; literally, *water* (same word as in Ps. xxxvi. 8). The "fatness" means the fat parts of the thank offerings, which were given to the priests (Lev. vii. 34). **Satisfied.** "Satiated" would be a happier rendering. The word is different from that rendered "satiate" just above.

Vers. 15—22.—From this glorious prospect Jeremiah's eye turns to the melancholy present. The land of Ephraim is orphaned and desolate. The prophet seems to hear Rachel weeping for her banished children, and comforts her with the assurance that they shall yet be restored. For Ephraim has come to repentance, and longs for reconciliation with his God, and God, who has overheard his soliloquy, relents, and comes to meet him with gracious promises. Then another voice is heard summoning Ephraim to prepare for his journey home. This verse is quoted by St. Matthew (ii. 17) with reference to the massacre of the innocents, with τότε ἐπληρώθη prefixed. The latter formula of itself suggests that there was a previous fulfilment of the prophecy, but that the analogy of the circumstances of the innocents justifies—nay, requires—the admission of a second fulfilment. In fact, the promise of the Messianic age seemed in as much danger of being rendered void when Herod wreaked his fury on the children of Bethlehem, as when the tribes of Israel were scattered in exile. Dean Stanley finds a geographical inconsistency in the two passages. "The context of ch. xxxi. 15 implies that the Ramah of the prophet was in the northern kingdom, probably Ramah of Benjamin. The context of Matt. ii. 18, on the other hand, implies that the Ramah of the evangelist was within sight of Bethlehem" ('Sinai and Palestine,' p. 225). But this remark involves the assumption that the quotation was not intended merely as an application.

Ver. 15.—**A voice was heard**; rather, *is heard.* It is a participle, indicating the continuance of the action. **In Ramah.** In the neighbourhood of which town Rachel was buried, according to 1 Sam. x. 2 ("the city" where Samuel and Saul were—ix. 25—appears to have been Ramah). **Rachel weeping for her children.** Rachel ("Rahel" is only a Germanizing way of writing the name), being the ancestress of the three tribes, Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, is represented as feeling like a mother for all the tribes connected with those three. Her "weeping" is no mere figure of speech. Jeremiah believes that the patriarchs and holy men of old continue to feel an interest in the fortunes of their descendants (comp. Isa. lxiii. 16).

Ver. 16.—Rachel is admonished to cease from weeping, because her work has not

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really been in vain; her children shall be restored. **Thy work shall be rewarded.** Like the Servant of the Lord, Rachel had said (though with the voiceless language of tears), "I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength for nought and in vain;" and like the ocean-mother of Zidon, "I have not travailed, nor brought forth children, neither nourished up young men, nor brought up virgins" (Isa. xxiii. 4). Rachel's work had been that of rearing up the patriarchs, "in whose loins" the tribes themselves were, in a certain sense. **From the land of the enemy**; *i.e.* from the countries of Israel's dispersion. But in the spirit of St. Matthew, we may fill the passage with a higher meaning, of which the prophet (like Shakespeare sometimes) was unconscious, namely, "from death;" and the passage thus becomes an undesigned prophecy of the Resurrection.

Ver. 17.—**Hope in thine end**; rather, *hope for thy future* (comp. on ch. xxix. 11). There is no occasion to render, with the Septuagint and Rosenmüller, "for thy posterity" (comp. Ps. cxix. 13, Hebrew); for Rachel identifies herself by sympathy with her descendants.

Vers. 18, 19.—The ground of this hope, viz. that Ephraim will humble himself with deep contrition.

Ver. 18.—**As a bullock unaccustomed** to the yoke; literally, *as an untaught calf* (comp. Hos. x. 11). **Turn thou me**, etc. Jeremiah has a peculiarly deep view of conversion. Isaiah (i. 16—20) simply calls upon his hearers to change their course of life; Jeremiah represents penitent Ephraim as beseeching God so to prepare him that he may indeed "turn."

Ver. 19.—**After that I was turned, I repented**; rather, *after my turning away* (as ch. viii. 4), *I have repented.* It is a different kind of "turning" which is here meant, a turning away from God. **I was instructed**; literally, *I was made to know*; i.e. brought to my senses by punishment. **I smote upon my thigh**; rather, *I have smitten*, etc. Ephraim describes his present state of mind, and the symbols by which he translates it into act. Smiting upon the thigh was a sign of mourning (comp. Ezek. xxi. 17). **I did bear**, etc.; rather, *I have borne*, etc. The "reproach of Ephraim's youth" is that which he brought upon himself in early times by his unfaithfulness to Jehovah.

Ver. 20.—The Divine speaker asks, as it were in surprise, whether Ephraim, who has so flagrantly sinned against him, can really be his **dear** (or, *precious*) **son**, his **pleasant child** (literally, *child of caressing*, i.e. one caressed). The latter expression occurs in a remarkable passage of Isaiah (v. 7). **Since I spake against him**; rather, *as often as I spake against him*; i.e. as often as I pronounced sentence against Ephraim—such a sentence as is recorded in Isa. ix. 8—21 (where the future tenses should be perfects) and xxviii. 1—4. We must remember that, with God, to speak is to perform. Often as Jehovah punished Israel, he still remembered him in love—a love which was the pledge of his future restoration to favour upon his true repentance. **I do earnestly remember**; rather, *I verily remembered.* "To remember" is the Old Testament term for providential care (comp. Gen. viii. 1; xix. 29). **My bowels are troubled**; literally, *sound, moan* (so Isa. xvi. 11; lxiii. 15). Something analogous to the thrilling sensation of deep human grief is predicated of Jehovah. Such is the "humility" of the God of revelation (Ps. xviii. 35; comp. Hos. xi. 8).

Ver. 21.—**Set thee up waymarks.** The "virgin of Israel" is addressed. She is directed to mark out the road for the returning exiles. The command is obviously rhetorical in form; the general sense is that the Israelites are to call to mind the road so familiar to their forefathers, though only known to themselves by tradition. The word rendered "waymarks" occurs again in 2 Kings xxxiii. 17 and Ezek. xxxix. 15. It apparently means a stone pillar, which might be used either as a waymark or a sepulchral monument. The **high heaps** seem to mean much the same thing; "signposts" would be a better rendering. **Set thine heart toward the highway**; rather, *turn thy thoughts*, etc., for the heart is here evidently the symbol of the intellectual rather than the moral life (comp. 1 Kings x. 2, and many other passages). A passage in the Psalms (lxxxiv. 6) will occur to every one, in which a psalmist, longing at a distance for the services of the temple, pronounces blessed the man "in whose heart are the highways [to Zion];" here, it is true, "heart" has the double meaning of "mind" and "affections," but "highway" has almost exactly the same sense as in the passage before us. **To these thy cities.** The unseen speaker is supposed to be in Palestine.

Ver. 22.—**How long wilt thou go about?** We must suppose the Israelites to be hesitating whether to set out on their journey or not. They are now admonished to put away their rebellious reluctance, and a special reason for this is added. **The Lord hath created**—*i.e.* hath decreed to create—**a new thing in the earth** (or, *in the land*); comp. Isa. xliii. 19 which suggests that a complete reversal of ordinary experience is indicated, as indeed the word "create" of itself prepares us to expect. And what is this promise granted as a sign to reluctant Israel? **A woman shall compass a man**; *i.e.* instead

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of shyly keeping aloof, or worse (as hitherto), Israel, Jehovah's bride, shall, with eager affection, press around her Divine husband. The phrase, however, is extremely difficult. Of other explanations, the most plausible philologically is that of Schnurrer and Gesenius, "a woman shall protect a man" (comp. Deut. xxxii. 10). The part of a sentinel, pacing round and round his charge, seems most unfitted for a woman. When enemies are abroad, it is the men's natural duty to perform this part for the women. But in the coming age, the country shall be so free from danger that the places of men and women may safely be reversed. But would a paradox of this kind be likely to be uttered in this connection? Surely a clearer statement would be necessary to remove the reluctance of the Israelites. Vers. 19, 20 suggest that Ephraim needed reassurance as to the attitude of Jehovah towards him. The promise of ver. 22, as explained above, would give precisely the needed strength and comfort. The exposition of St. Jerome and other Fathers, that the birth of Christ from a virgin is referred to, is altogether inadmissible, (1) because the nouns which form the subject and the predicate respectively indicate sex, not age, and the first in particular cannot be tortured so as to mean "virgin;" and (2) there is no article to confine the reference to any particular persons.

Vers. 23—26.—But the prophet would not have Judah suppose that Ephraim has supplanted her; she too shall be restored, and shall enjoy a happy pastoral and agricultural life.

Ver. 23.—**As yet**; rather, *again* (as ver. 4). **Mountain of holiness.** Does this mean simply Mount Zion, or the whole highland country of Judah (comp. Isa. xi. 9)? The former view is the safer; it is by no means clear that "mountain" in Isaiah or anywhere else in the Old Testament means the Holy Land.

Ver. 24.—The ideal of outward life exhibited by the prophets is still the agricultural and pastoral. Jeremiah puts this more forcibly than the Authorized Version represents. Instead of, **And there shall dwell in Judah,** etc., he says, *And there shall dwell therein* (viz. in the land) *Judah and all his cities together as husbandmen, and they shall go about with flocks*, i.e. they shall attend to their ancient pursuits without let or hindrance from invaders (comp. Isa. xxxii. 20). "Go about" (literally, *break up*) is the regular word for the periodical journeying of the nomad life.

Ver. 25.—For Jehovah will have fulfilled every unsatisfied craving. **I have satiated** (literally, *watered*) means "I have decreed to satiate;" it is the perfect of prophetic certitude, which represents an event as already having taken place in the Divine counsels. **Sorrowful**; rather, *languishing* (see on ver. 12).

Ver. 26.—**Upon this I awaked,** etc. Who the speaker is here has been much debated. That Jehovah is meant is not an admissible view. A weak believer may say complainingly, "Why sleepest thou?" but God himself cannot be represented under the image of a sleeper. There seems, however, to be no reason why the prophet should not have used this language. The doubt is whether a real, physical sleep is meant, or merely an ecstatic condition resembling sleep. Hengstenberg decides for the latter. But there is no parallel for sleep in the sense of ecstasy, and, on the other hand, there is evidence enough for dreams as the channels of Divine revelation (Gen. xxxi. 10, 11; 1 Kings iii. 5; ix. 2; Joel ii. 28). As Naegelsbach points out, this is the only unqualifiedly comforting prophecy in the whole book, and may well have left a sweet savour in the prophet's memory. Stern, indeed, was the reality which the moment of his waking brought back to him.

Vers. 27—30.—The physical side of the Messianic blessing. Its effect upon the heart of the pardoned sinners will be such that they will fully recognize the justice of the Divine judgments. There will no longer be any room for a certain favourite proverb; the death of a sinner will be universally acknowledged to be the reward of his personal sin (Keil).

Ver. 27.—**I will sow,** etc. The passage may be illustrated by Isa. xxvi. 18, where the Church of the restored exiles is represented as complaining that the land (of Judah) has not been brought into a state of security, and that inhabitants (in sufficient numbers) have not been begotten. Similarly here, only the tone of complaint is wanting. The thought has suggested itself — Will the Israelites of the latter days be sufficient to fill up the land? Yes, is the answer of revelation; for Jehovah will perform a wonder, and make the people and their cattle so prolific that it will seem as if children and young cattle grew up like plants.

Ver. 28.—**As I have watched . . . so will I watch,** etc. The allusion is to the twofold commission given to the prophet (ch. i. 10), which was partly to pluck up and to destroy, partly to build and to plant. Jehovah has hitherto been "watchful" (another point of contact with ch. i.; see on ch. i. 12) over the fulfilment of the destructive prophecies; he will now be equally zealous for that of the promises of regeneration.

Ver. 29.—**Have eaten a sour grape**; rather, *sour grapes.* The prophet (like Ezekiel,

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ch. xviii.) condemns the use of this proverb, and declares that the sinner is the artificer of his own ruin. At first sight, it may seem as if Jeremiah opposes the second commandment, which describes how God "visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children" (Exod. xx. 5). This, however, cannot really be, for he endorses this declaration later on (ch. xxxii. 18). The fact is that he is not so much condemning the proverb, as the blasphemous application of it made by the Jews of his time. It is an eternal truth that sin perpetuates itself (except by the miracles of grace) in the children of transgressors, and intensified sin leads to intensified punishment. But the children of transgressors do not cease to be responsible for their own share in the sin;—this was the truth which Jeremiah's contemporaries ignored. He does not deny the solidarity of the family or the race, but he superadds the neglected truth of the special responsibility of the individual. This is one among many evidences of the deepening sense of individual life in the later period of the Jewish monarchy. (A somewhat different view is offered by Delitzsch, 'Messianic Prophecies,' § 50. According to him, Jeremiah looks forward to a time when the individual shall be liberated from the consequences of his solidarity with his race, and when personality shall be "invested with its rights." But can the individual be thus liberated?)

Vers. 31—34.—The new covenant. A prophecy which stands out from the rest of Jeremiah by its evangelical character, in which it strongly reminds us of parts of the second half of Isaiah. The doctrine of the covenant is "the thread which binds together the hopes and the fears of the prophet, his certainty of coming woe, his certainty of ultimate blessing." A covenant was granted of old, but that covenant had on man's side been broken. Still "the gifts and calling of God are not to be retracted" (Rom. xi. 29); and Jeremiah felt that the very nature of God guaranteed the renewal of the covenant on a new basis. "Covenant" is, no doubt, an unfortunate rendering. The Hebrew word so rendered means, primarily, a decision or appointment, and there is a whole group of passages in the Old Testament which requires this meaning (see the present writer's note, in 'The Prophecies of Isaiah,' on Isa. xlii. 6). We retain it, however, as that with which the reader is familiar, and only remind him that God is everything, and man nothing, in fixing the terms of the transaction. The characteristics of the new covenant are three: (1) The relation between God and his people is protected from all risk by God himself making the people what he would have them be. (2) "Whereas, in the case of the old, the law of duty was written on *tables of stone*, in the case of the new the law is to be written on the *heart*; whereas, under the old, owing to the ritual character of the worship, the knowledge of God and his will was a complicated affair, in which men generally were helplessly dependent on a professional class, under the new, the worship of God would be reduced to the simplest spiritual elements, and it would be in every man's power to know God at first hand, the sole requisite for such knowledge as would then be required being a pure heart." And (3) "whereas, under the old, the provisions for the cancelling of sin were very unsatisfactory, and utterly unfit to perfect the worshipper as to conscience, by dealing thoroughly with the problem of guilt, under the new God would grant to his people a real, absolute, and perennial forgiveness, so that the abiding relation between him and them should be as if sin had never existed" (Dr. A. B. Bruce, in *The Expositor*, January, 1880, pp. 70, 71). Comp. the abolition of the ark indicated in ch. iii. 16.—The inspired author of Hebrews tells us (viii. 6—13), speaking generally, that this promise delivered through Jeremiah was fulfilled in the gospel. But it must be remembered that the gospel has not yet taken form outwardly, except in a comparatively meagre sense. If the Jews as a nation (that is, the better part or kernel of Israel) should embrace the gospel, not necessarily in the logical expression familiar to the West, but in its essential facts and truths, we should see quite another embodiment of the promise, and feel the spiritual impulse in ourselves as we have not yet done. It seems appropriate, in conclusion, to quote a finely expressed passage from De Quincey's exposition of the New Testament term *μετάνοια*. Without pledging ourselves to the absolute correctness of his explanation of that word, his language may be well applied to Jeremiah's prophecy. "What would have been thought of any prophet, if he should have promised to transfigurate the celestial mechanics; if he had said, 'I will create a new pole-star, a new zodiac, and new laws of gravitation;' briefly, 'I will make new earth and new heavens'? And yet a thousand times more awful it was to undertake the writing of new laws upon the spiritual conscience of man."

Ver. 32.—**Although I was an husband unto them.** The translation of the Septuagint *κἀγὼ ἠμέλησα αὐτῶν*, is undoubtedly wrong, though adopted for consistency's sake by the author of Hebrews (viii. 9). The phrase is the same as in ch. iii. 14, where even the Septuagint has *ἐγὼ κατακυριεύσω ὑμῶν*.

Ver. 33.—**After those days**; *i.e.* after they have fully come; not, after they are over.

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I will put my law, etc. Of course, not the Pentateuch, but the principles of which the rules in the Pentateuch were the temporary application. It is not here denied that there were, or might be, some under the Old Testament dispensation who had the Divine Law in their heart (see some of the psalms), but speaking of the people as a whole, it must be said that the Law was an external dictator rather than a bosom friend, a mechanical rule rather than a λόγος ἔμφυτος (Jas. i. 21).

Ver. 34.—On this verse, see note on the paragraph.

Vers. 35—37.—Guarantee of Israel's national continuance. A marvellous promise, in the face of the Babylonian Captivity.

Ver. 35.—**The ordinances of the moon**; *i.e.* the moon in its appointed changes (comp. ch. xxxiii. 23). **Which divideth the sea when**, etc.; rather, *which stirreth up the sea, so that*, etc. This is one of the points of content in Jeremiah with the latter part of Isaiah (see Isa. li. 17; and comp. Job xxvi. 12).

Ver. 37.—**Thus saith the Lord.** "It is not without meaning that the prophet so frequently repeats: 'Thus saith the Lord.' This formed the A and Ω; his word was the sole ground of hope for Israel. Apart from it, despair was as reasonable as now it was unreasonable" (Hengstenberg).

Vers. 38—40.—The connection is not very clear. The main point of these verses is that Jerusalem, when rebuilt, shall be altogether "the Lord's." Its circumference shall even be extended with the single object of including spots at present unclean, but then to become holy like the rest of the city. According to Hengstenberg and Keil, Jerusalem is here a figure of the kingdom of God in the latter days.

Ver. 38.—**The tower of Hananeel.** This lay at the north-east corner of the city (Neh. iii. 1; xii. 39). **The gate of the corner.** At the north-west corner (2 Kings xiv. 13; 2 Chron. xxvi. 9). Both this and the tower of Hananeel are mentioned together again in the prophecy of the glorification of Jerusalem, in Zech. xiv. 10.

Ver. 39.—**Over against it upon the hill Gareb**; rather, *straight forward unto the hill Gareb.* The hill of Gareb is not mentioned elsewhere; its meaning is probably "Leper's Hill." It must, of course, have been outside the city, and may be identified (after Schleussner and Hitzig) with "the fourth hill, which is called Bezetha" (Josephus, 'De Bell. Jud.,' v. 4, 2). **To Goath**; rather, *to Goah.* But the reading of the Peshito, "to Gibeah," should probably be adopted.

Ver. 40.—The southern boundary of the city. **The whole valley of the dead bodies, and of the ashes**; rather, . . . *even the dead bodies and the ashes.* It is assumed by most that Jeremiah means the valley of Hinnom, which, after its defilement by Josiah (2 Kings xxiii. 10), had become a receptacle of rubbish and offal. It is, however, against this view that the word for "valley" is not *gai* (elsewhere connected with Hinnom), but *'ēmek*, i.e. "deep-lying plain." The "dead bodies" are the corpses of men and animals, destroyed by the judgment of God, and lying unburied; but where, seems uncertain. **Ashes.** Wood ashes are not here meant, but those of flesh and fat, which remained after the burning of a sacrificial victim (see Lev. i. 16; and comp. iv. 12). **The horse gate.** Mentioned in Neh. iii. 28. **Holy unto the Lord.** The unclean spots in the neighbourhood having been transformed. The expression reminds us of Exod. xxviii. 36 (the legend on the forefront of the high priest's mitre).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*The close relations of God and his people.* I. THE OCCASION OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CLOSE RELATIONS BETWEEN GOD AND HIS PEOPLE. 1. After *chastisement.* This and the other blessings promised in "the book of consolation" are to follow the endurance of the Captivity. God often accords the choicest spiritual blessings to those of his children who are called to endure the bitterest trials. 2. After *repentance.* The people learned to grieve for their wickedness, and return to God in penitence and trust under the wholesome lessons of adversity. Then they were ready for reunion with God. Mere suffering will not lead to this. Suffering is useful just because it may be a means of leading us to humble ourselves and turn to God. 3. Accompanying a restoration of *temporal prosperity.* The glories of the restoration referred to in the last chapter are closely associated with the high spiritual privileges promised in the text. Earthly good things are of little use unless they are crowned by higher blessings. The difference between the prosperity of the wicked and that of true Christians is that the one is the highest good enjoyed, and thus tends to become an idol and a snare, while the other is subordinate to better things and purified by their pervading influence. Thus received, prosperity may be safely enjoyed. 4. Contemporaneously with the

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punishment of the wicked. "At the same time," etc. God is discriminating in his judgments because he is calm and just, though we cannot discern his course and aim. The highest spiritual good is received only when our spiritual foes are overthrown.

II. THE PERSONS WHO ENJOY THESE CLOSE RELATIONS. 1. *Israel.* The promise was to the favoured nation, to the exclusion of others. Elsewhere prophets foretold the spread of the blessings of redemption to all nations, but always on the understanding that those nations entered into the Jewish covenant and became spiritual Israelites. The highest blessings are offered to all men, but with the condition that they who would receive them become his true children. The invitation is to mankind; the promise is to the people of God. 2. The *families* of Israel. God gives distinct family gifts, blessing children through their parents. Religion sanctifies the family. Family life is the largest and highest form of natural human life. 3. *All* the families of Israel. The privileges are not confined to certain selected families—to those which had always remained faithful, to any spiritual aristocracy, to any priestly order; not Aaron's family alone, nor Levi's tribe, nor Judah to the exclusion of the ten tribes; but all are to be restored. All Christians are called to the free enjoyment of God's peculiar people; spiritual privileges are confined within no exclusive limitations. All Christians are kings and priests; all can now enter the holiest sanctuary, enjoy the closest communion with God.

III. THE CHARACTER OF THESE CLOSE RELATIONS. 1. It has a *human side*: "I will be the God of all the families of Israel." (1) Jehovah is acknowledged. The people had followed Baal. They return to the true God. Christians who acknowledge God and Christ should frankly confess their faith. (2) God is worshipped. If he is regarded by us as becomes his being and character, he must be honoured as well as acknowledged. (3) God is obeyed. If he is admitted to be our God, he must be submitted to as our sovereign Lord. (4) God is trusted. Our God is our supreme Helper. When we enter into right relations with God, we learn to confide in him. (5) God is enjoyed. He is *our* God as our Portion. 2. The character of this relation between God and his people has also a *Divine side*: "And they shall be my people." Religion is not only an exercise of human spiritual activities; it is also a sphere in which God works, influencing his people. Though his people are unworthy of God, he is not ashamed of them. He owns them. If God regards any men as his people, great consequences follow. (1) He will prize them as his treasures, showing to them love, bestowing upon them favours, guarding them from harm. (2) He will lay obligations upon them, call them to service, honour them with trusts. These two characteristics of the close relation of God and his people are nearly allied. God will not honour and protect us while we forget or disown him; but his great favours to us help us the better to own and serve him.

Ver. 3.—*The everlasting love of God.* God appeared "from afar" to Jeremiah. When he seems to have forsaken us he is not loving us the less. In these dark hours he may give to us, as to Jeremiah, the richest assurance of his everlasting love.

I. CONSIDER THE WONDER OF THE FACT THAT GOD'S LOVE IS EVERLASTING. There is a wonder about this fact, since there are so many things that might well be thought likely to limit and stay the love of God to such beings as we are, viz.: 1. Our *unworthiness.* God is holy, and must delight only in holiness; he is great, and can create innumerable beings of far higher powers than ours. Why, then, should he love such imperfect creatures as men?—why love those who are corrupt and sinful? 2. Our *indifference.* Love looks for a return of love; but men have treated God's love with neglect. Through the long ages during which God has been visiting his children with ceaseless loving-kindness they have been coldly turning aside to their own ways, deaf to the entreaties of an infinite condescension. 3. Our *unfaithfulness.* For love to remain unbroken it is expected that it should be honoured by fidelity. Unfaithfulness is naturally regarded as a reason for withdrawing the privileges of affection. But God's children have been untrue to him. They have forsaken his ways, abused his blessings, flung insult on his mercy. How, then, can he continue to love them? It is, indeed, a marvel that, through these long ages of the world's wild wanderings, God should still follow his unworthy children with ceaseless love, never refusing to bless them, always entreating them to return to him. And it must be a marvel to us that, through all the

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years of our unworthy lives, he has shown the same long-suffering, forbearing mercy to each of us. It is wonderful that God should ever love such unworthy creatures as we are, but it is "passing strange" that he should not cease to love us after all our provocations of his wrath, that he should love us with "an everlasting love," and should "have continued his loving-kindness unto" us.

II. INQUIRE INTO SOME OF THE REASONS WHY GOD'S LOVE IS EVERLASTING. We must not look for these in any hidden merits of our own, which our modesty has passed over while God's favour has been won by them. The secret of the love of God and of its eternal endurance is to be sought in his nature and in his relations to us. 1. *The nature of God.* "God is love." He loves because he cannot but love, because he delights to love, because his love must be ever flowing and is so vast that it must needs flow out eternally in all directions. It is not the attraction of the object, but the character of the love, that accounts for its perpetual endurance. The earth is bathed in summer sunlight without having any peculiar attractions for light—only because the vast stores of the sun must ever empty themselves by radiating out into space. The stream fertilizes the valley through no influence of the plants drawing it thither, but just because abundant springs pour forth their waters. And God radiates love, pours forth floods of blessing, because he is full of love, because love has its laws of diffusion. Such love is not destroyed by the unworthiness of the object. Closed shutters do not prevent the sunshine from playing about the house. Sandy deserts, in which the waters of the stream are lost, do not stay the torrents from flowing down the mountain-sides. It is the nature of true and perfect love to be eternal. "Charity endureth all things," and "never faileth." "Love is love for evermore." 2. God's *relations with us.* God is our Father. We are his children by nature, and can never cease to be so. The prodigal son was an unworthy child, yet in his degradation he could still think of his *father* (Luke xv. 17). A parent's love is not caused nor limited by the merits of his children. It has a deeper, a more unselfish source. It survives all the destruction of just claims. God's love is the perfect parent's love. A mother whose daughter had left the home years back always kept her door on the latch at night, that, if her poor child returned at any hour, she should never find it barred against her. Human nature is weak. A mother's love *may* fail, but God's never (Isa. xlix. 15).

III. NOTE THE PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES THAT FLOW FROM THE EVERLASTING LOVE OF GOD. 1. God will *do all that is possible for our highest good.* We may believe with William Law "that no creature can suffer from any evil from which infinite goodness can deliver it." God has gone so far as to give his only begotten Son to die for us (John iii. 16). We may be sure that he will do all else that is ever possible for the salvation and blessing of his children. May we not, then, well hope that an everlasting love will outlast and wear down all opposition of the stubborn but finite natures even of the worst of us, though it take vast ages to accomplish the result? At all events, he is a rash man who would set limits to the future triumphs of the "ceaseless, unexhausted grace" of God. 2. *We should return to him with trust and love.* The worst man living, if he repent, need not dread a harsh reception, for God's love has outlived his sins. Here is infinite encouragement for penitence; here is hope for the lowest. God loves even him. Surely, therefore, God will welcome his unworthy child when he returns home. We have in this everlasting love of God inducements to urge us (1) to repent and no longer abuse his goodness; (2) to trust in him; (3) to love him in return for his love; (4) to find our rest and joy in him; (5) to devote ourselves to his service (with love "all tasks are sweet"); and (6) to love our brethren with God-like love for the sake of God's love (1 John iv. 11).

Vers. 15—17.—*Rachel weeping for her children.* I. RACHEL HAS NATURAL CAUSE FOR HER GRIEF. Sword, pestilence, and famine ravage the land. The invasion by Nebuchadnezzar desolates the old home of the family of Rachel, bringing death to those who cling to it and scattering the survivors in exile. Such a calamity was in itself most mournful; but the disappointment it brought to the cherished hopes of Israel in a golden future deepened the distress to despair. It looked as though it were the shipwreck of all the Messianic dreams of ancient prophecy. So also the "massacre of the innocents," with reference to which these words of Jeremiah are quoted in the New Testament, was more than an ordinary disaster. It threatened Christ and his redemption. If earthly

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trouble is great, how far greater would be the destruction of the higher spiritual hopes of God's people! We may be thankful that we have no such cause of distress as that of Rachel at Ramah and at Bethlehem. Though the Christian's earthly fortunes may be tempest-tossed, his highest hopes are founded on a Rock. No worldly trouble can touch these. It is noteworthy that Rachel, and not Jacob, is here represented as weeping for her children. It is the mother's heart that breaks first when her children are taken from her. Even the savage tigress knows this natural grief. It is so bitter that no earthly consolation can assuage it.

II. RACHEL GIVES NATURAL VENT TO HER GRIEF. She weeps. She may thank God for tears; they are nature's relief to a burdened heart. It is best not to hide a sorrow till it eats out the heart like a canker.

> "Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak
> Whispers the o'erfraught heart and bids it break."

Christ does not inflict harsh and unnatural restraints upon mourners, like those of Stoicism. At the grave of Lazarus "Jesus wept." St. Paul invites sympathetic Christians to "weep with them that weep." Yet it is well to convert our tears into prayers. If the bruised spirit cannot speak, cannot think, can but moan, yet it may make its inarticulate cry an utterance to heaven that the all-pitiful God will hear. The mistake of the mourner is not that she "refuseth to be comforted"—"comfort scorned of devils" may be but a mockery—but that while she weeps she forgets to bring her burden to him who has promised to sustain. It is natural to express sorrow; it is Christian to carry the sorrow to Christ.

III. RACHEL HAS DIVINE CONSOLATIONS FOR HER GRIEF. Human comfort is vain in such anguish as hers. Our little platitudes with which we would quiet the mourner are plasters that only irritate the wound they cannot heal. But God has his higher consolations. He does not bid the tears to stay without good reason. Rachel is to refrain her voice from weeping because there is hope for her in time to come. Jesus bade the widow of Nain not to weep because he was about to restore her son. God will wipe away all tears from his children's eyes by giving them a real harvest of joy for their sowing in tears. The Christian is comforted by hope. He should not sorrow as those without hope. Israel was to be restored to Canaan. The Christian families shall be reunited in the home above.

Ver. 18.—*Ephraim's return.* I. THE MOST ABANDONED OF GOD'S CHILDREN MAY RETURN TO HIM. Ephraim was unfaithful before Judah, and fell into greater wickedness. The northern tribes were punished for their sins by a scattering that destroyed for ever their national existence as a separate kingdom. Yet even Ephraim is to return. No one of God's children—no one of the great human family, we of the New Testament revelation may say—is beyond God's love. God loved Ephraim as well as Judah. Ephraim is a dear son (ver. 20). God loves the whole world. Therefore all may return; therefore we may be sure God has a way by which all can return. Christ, lifted up, will draw *all* men unto himself.

II. GOD LEADS HIS CHILDREN TO DESIRE TO RETURN TO HIM BY MEANS OF CHASTISEMENT. Ephraim says, "Thou didst correct me, and I received correction." Herein is one of the chief ends of suffering; even when deserved for sin it is not to give penal deserts and only satisfy justice, but rather to urge the wrong-doer to see his fault and repent. Chastisement leads to reflection, humbles, makes us feel our need and helplessness, shows the want of God and his consolations, and so inclines us to return to him. To profit us, however, it must be rightly endured. We must *receive* correction, not harden our hearts against it.

III. BEFORE RETURNING TO GOD, MEN ARE BOTH FOOLISH AND OBSTINATE IN SIN. Ephraim is like "an untaught calf." Ephraim had worshipped calves; in course of time Ephraim degraded himself to the nature of his gods. We cannot rise higher than the object of our worship. Every man is made after the image of his God; but in all men this special quality of Ephraim is found so long as they remain away from God in sin. 1. They are *foolish* as the untaught calf. The wicked man may be worldly wise, but he is ignorant in spiritual matters—must become a little child, and learn as a child, if he would enter the kingdom of heaven. 2. They are *obstinate.* Pride and self-will

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rule the unrepentant heart. Herein is the great hindrance to the wholesome fruits of chastisement.

IV. THE DIVINE LIFE IN MAN BEGINS WITH THE TURNING ROUND OF THE SOUL TOWARDS GOD. This "conversion" is the first step. It may not be suddenly discernible. It may not be indicated by any one epoch in our history. But it must take place. We have been wandering further and further from God. The most momentous step is the first step back to him. We have to learn the necessity of this; to understand that while we remain in the old way, however pleasant it may be, it is leading us away from God, our mission, and our home; to see the importance of a change, a revolution, a regeneration, a new creation. Religion cannot begin with a sinful man in a mere improvement, much less in a natural development. He must turn round.

V. GOD ONLY CAN TURN HIS CHILDREN BACK TO HIMSELF. Ephraim prays, "Turn thou me, and I will return." We lack the desire to return until he "from whom all good desires proceed" implants the earnest wish in our hearts. We have not the strength to return. Old habits of sin are fetters that bind us down to the old life. The will is corrupt, and therefore we cannot will aright. But God does move us to return and give us power to return. The gospel is not only an invitation; it is the power of God. By his Spirit God gives us new birth and the free life of his children. Yet for this grace we must seek in faith and penitence. Ephraim prays that God will turn him. We cannot turn ourselves. God will not turn us against our will. If we seek his grace, he will turn us to himself.

Ver. 25.—*Divine satisfaction.* There are always the weary who need rest, the sorrowful who need consolation. 1. *Naturally* we all have restless longings, large desires that go out beyond the present and the attainable. The soul has its appetites, its hunger, its thirst. 2. *Sin and sorrow* have deepened our need. The Jews in their calamities were a type of mankind in its sin and weariness.

I. NO EARTHLY SATISFACTION WILL MEET THESE WANTS. Food for the body cannot satisfy the soul. Man is not able to live by bread alone. The life is more than meat. We are too large for the world and its gifts, rich and abundant as they may be.

"We look before and after,
And pine for what is not;
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought."

(Shelley.)

Hence the restlessness and dissatisfaction we experience in the height of prosperity. Thank God for these feelings. They are indications of a heavenly birth, indications of immortality.

II. GOD OFFERS US FULL SATISFACTION. He will satisfy—satiate. 1. God gives *all* we need. God does not keep his children on half-rations. He has rich stores, and he offers freely. From our broken cisterns we turn to his ever-flowing fountains. 2. What God gives is of the *kind* we need—true light, not mocking speculations; Divine consolations of hope and peace, not barren philosophic maxims, but full and free forgiveness. What God does he does perfectly. He does not call us to a bare salvation, but to a full satisfaction, meeting the peculiar and deep wants of the soul with the special satisfaction they need, and bestowing this to satiation.

III. THE FULL ENJOYMENT OF DIVINE SATISFACTION BELONGS TO THE FUTURE. Much may be enjoyed now. Larger faith would open at once more abundant stores. God's hand is not shortened. It is we who limit our own enjoyment of his grace by unbelief and sinfulness. Still there can be no perfect satisfaction in this imperfect world. Heaven will be totally different from earth in the fact that here we are always reaching out to the beyond; there for the first time all needs will be satisfied. The hope of such a condition should lead to patience and a faithful following of the way of the cross now that leads to the home of rest hereafter.

Ver. 29.—*Heredity and individual responsibility.* The passage before us is interesting as indicating a great advance in freedom and justice of thought from the old orthodoxy

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that was satisfied with the punishment of children together with their parents to a new and wiser doctrine of individual reponsibility. But it is important to observe that it is more than a sign of advancing thought. It is a prophecy concerning facts, a prediction of a higher justice of the future. The old notion here condemned is not condemned because it is false; nay, it is treated as true for the present. The new idea is not substituted as a better interpretation of the facts of experience; it is a description of a higher order of facts not yet realized. The old doctrine applies with a considerable measure of truth to Judaism; the new is part of the larger justice of Christianity. For the Jewish religion was essentially a family religion; its advantages came to the individual through the nation, the tribe, the family; the first condition for receiving them was descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But Christianity is fundamentally individualistic. It elevates the family, it creates the Church—one grand family of Christian brethren; but it begins with individual faith and ends with individual responsibility. Nevertheless, we have not yet perfect justice. Jeremiah's prophecy is still a prophecy to us. Let us examine the two conditions of life that are brought before us by the contrast of prediction with the present order of affairs.

I. THE PRESENT CONDITION OF HEREDITY. It is true now that if "the fathers have eaten some grapes the children's teeth are set on edge." Hereditary punishment and hereditary moral corruption are among the darkest mysteries of "all this unintelligible world." But they are facts that follow necessary social and physiological laws. 1. Children suffer the *punishment* of their parents' sins. Poverty, dishonour, disease, pass from parent to child. The child of a spendthrift becomes a beggar, the son of a thief is ostracized, the drunkard's child diseased, perhaps insane. 2. Children inherit *moral corruption* from their parents. Where this is the case it may be thought to lighten the mystery of hereditary punishment. However that may be, it is itself a deeper mystery, a more horrible injustice. It is remarked that if God visits "the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation," it is to generations of "them that hate" him. But if the wickedness that seems to justify the long-lived punishment is also hereditary, is not the case the more hard? Now, Jeremiah teaches us that we are not to be satisfied with this as a final and equitable arrangement. It belongs to these present times that are out of joint, and it will be superseded by a better order.

II. THE FUTURE CONDITION OF INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY. (Ver. 30.) This was to come with the Messianic era. We have seen it beginning in the revelation of Christianity. It can only be perfected when Christ's work is perfected by his second advent for judgment. A right social order may do something in this direction. Jeremiah anticipated a wiser, more discriminating exercise of justice in the restored nation after the Captivity. But the full realization must be left for a future dispensation of Divine justice. At the last every man will be called upon alone to answer for his own sins, and judgment will be swift and appropriate. Present inequalities will then be rectified. Meanwhile the injustice of hereditary punishment can be compensated, not only by future alleviations but by turning the punishment into a wholesome discipline, while the injustice of moral corruption will be corrected ultimately by judging a man according to the free choice of his will—how he behaved when he was free to act, how far he took new steps downwards, with all due allowance for natural weakness and hereditary tendencies.

Vers. 31—34.—*The new covenant.* I. THE GRANTING OF A NEW COVENANT. Hitherto the Messianic era with all its glories has been regarded as the development and perfection of earlier ages. Here, for the first time, it is revealed as the realization of an entirely new order. This is the first clear indication of the difference between the Law and the gospel which grew more distinct as the latter was better understood, till St. Paul accomplished his great work of finally severing the two. In these verses we have the first justification for dividing religion into two dispensations and the Bible into two "Testaments." They constitute a great landmark in the history of religious thought. To us who live in the Christian age they are further most practically valuable for the description they give of our high and peculiar privileges and the promises they contain of greater blessing yet to be unfolded. Still, it is important to observe that these privileges and blessings were not always enjoyed. 1. Truth is eternal, but the *know-*

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ledge of truth is progressive. Hence the religious ideas of the race change, widen, rise to higher visions. The Bible is a progressive revelation. Theology—the human interpretation of Scripture and speculation on Divine things—is also progressive. Christians must not be bound by the *ipsissima verba* of Old Testament texts. The Old Testament itself says that these shall be superseded. Christians of one age should not be fettered by the orthodoxy of an earlier age. 2. God is changeless, but his *modes of action vary* according to the varying conditions of men. The same principles of justice and love ever pervade his dealings with his creatures. But, like the parent who changes his domestic regulations as his family grows older, God has new dispensations for the later ages of the human family. He educates his children through different standards. There must ever be milk for babes and meat for strong men. Children need restraints and simple instruction, which gradually give place to more freedom and confidence and higher teaching. These changing requirements are met by the suitable adaptation of God's revelation from age to age.

II. THE CONTENTS OF THE NEW COVENANT. 1. The *Law written in the heart* takes the place of the Law written on the stone tables. Religion becomes more internal, spiritual, personal. (1) Real *knowlege* is enjoyed. The people might have the Law in writing, and never read it or fail to understand what might be to them mere words. The Law in the heart is understood, grasped, possessed in thought, not only in words. (2) *Principles* take the place of outward ordinances. For a multitude of petty details, for a complication of rules, for a set of narrow maxims, men are to have large principles in their hearts, such as truth, justice, purity, love to God, and love to man. This makes religion and morality more comprehensive, more deep, more real, and at the same time more free. (3) *Affection* becomes the ruling motive. The Law is in the heart as a treasure, loved rather than feared, obeyed from healthy impulse instead of compulsion. It becomes part of a man's very soul. Ultimately, from being a constraint to his will, it becomes identical with his will, transforming that to its own image. 2. The *spread of the knowledge of the true God is to be universal.* (1) It is vouchsafed to the *individual.* The distinctions of the priestly class and of the prophetic order are abolished. All Christians are priests; all may enjoy a measure of prophetic inspiration (Joel ii. 28, 29; Rev. i. 4). This is partly a result of the first principle. An outward religion only can be corporate and representative. Thoughts are private; spirituality is personal; inward religiousness is individual. (2) It is promised to *all men.* All nations are to enjoy the new, larger privileges. Christ breaks down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile. This great fact is also partly a result of the first principle. National distinctions are mostly external. Questions of birth and geographical boundary that have much to do with a visible organization and the administration of external laws do not apply to spiritual conditions. It is right that an inward spiritual law should be universal. But the promise goes beyond the character of the new dispensation to an assurance of its universal acceptance. "All men *shall* know the Lord, from the least unto the greatest"—young and old, simple and noble, foolish and wise, worthless and good, savage and civilized. Here is the great encouragement for Christian missions. They do not follow a mere desire of charity. They are realizing a promise of God. 3. These results follow *perfect forgiveness of sin.* This is the peculiarly Christian and evangelical element of the new covenant. The Law can only be written on the heart after the old sin has been washed out. The enjoyment of spiritual religious knowledge must follow a renewal of the spiritual nature. These privileges were impossible under the Law, because no outward ordinances, no "blood of bulls and goats," could take away sin. But when Christ came as the perfect Sacrifice, "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world," and brought in perfect forgiveness, he made it possible for us to enjoy the inward vision and brought the privilege within the reach of all men.

Vers. 35—37.—*Guarantees of perpetuity.* These words are a promise to the Jews, and plainly refer to the national existence of Israel; but the breadth and spirituality of the covenant they confirm warrants us in seeing in them the pledges of God's faithfulness and the Church's stability for all who enjoy the privileges of the covenant. These pledges are to be seen in the symbolism of nature. The God of grace is the God of nature. Spiritual revelation throws light on the vague religion of nature; but nature

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sends back confirmations for the truths of the higher revelation. Two are named here.

I. THE UNIFORMITY OF LAW. This great doctrine has come to the forefront of modern science. By some it is thought to be a difficulty in the way of religious belief. But Jeremiah shows us how to regard it as an encouragement for faith. It proves to us the unchangeableness of God. Events shift and vary, but laws remain. The seasons come and go, but the sun still shines and rules them. Though the sea rages and roars, its wild waves are curbed by invisible reins, linked to heavenly motions, obedient to unvarying laws. So we may learn that amid the changing circumstances of life and the varying actions of God in providence the same great principles are maintained and the promises of God work out their blessed results unceasingly. This is true of God's thoughts and will. It is true of our personal enjoyment of the privileges of his covenant. Israel is to endure. The Church is founded on a rock. The "final perseverance" of the Christian follows from his identification of his life with eternal laws of God. God will no more cast off his people than the sun cease to rule the seasons or the moon the tides; for in grace, as in nature, eternal laws and principles preserve eternal stability to the spiritual universe.

II. THE IMMEASURABLE GREATNESS OF THE UNIVERSE. As a mere figure of speech, ver. 37 is highly expressive. By appealing to an impossible feat God pledges his word the more clearly and the more forcibly. But we have here also an analogy based upon common principles of the material and spiritual worlds. 1. The Creator of heaven and earth is too great to be changeable. Change is a sign of weakness. Strength secures stability. 2. Our action is a small thing in the sight of God. It cannot shake the foundations of the universe, cannot even touch them. To us it appears to revolutionize all things; but God sees it in its true light and treats it with calm pity. It is not in the power of such beings as we are to overturn the counsels of God. 3. As nature is wrapped in mystery, so is the spiritual kingdom of God. There are in both hidden forces the action of which we cannot predict. Therefore it is rash and foolish for us to judge God's actions by our limited knowledge. He may appear to cast his people off. We may no longer see him. His actions may seem harsh and cruel. But we are not competent to judge. Out of the mystery of Nature and her dark depths of being, out of midnight and winter, there issue life and light; out of God's darkest dispensations of providence his eternal counsels of love proceed to their unerring beneficent results.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 2.—*Grace preparing for grace.* There is some doubt as to the time alluded to, whether that of the Exodus or that of the Exile. A careful examination would seem to make it clear that the former alone corresponds to the description. Pharaoh's cruel edict and the judgments and wars of the desert thinned the ranks of the Israelites. A remnant was left, with whom God entered into covenant relationship. Their survival under these circumstances was a sign of the Divine favour, at the time hard to be understood, but in the future abundantly confirmed. Their ultimate entrance into Canaan was the seal of their acceptance.

I. THE PRESENT TROUBLES OF SAINTS ARE NO PROOF OF THEIR REJECTION. The history of the Church shows this. Here is an instance; there have been many such. The best of God's servants have been most severely tried, and that just before attaining great rewards and satisfactions. The exiles of Babylon are, therefore, to be of good cheer. The afflictions of the present may not only be the punishment for past transgressions, but much more—a preparation for future blessedness and usefulness, a grace in germ if not in formation. In the case of the Church they may bring back to a study of the title-deeds of faith; in that of the individual they may promote humility, heart-searching, and efforts to amend. However hard to bear, they should be endured as a grace preparing for grace.

II. WHERE THE ESSENCE OF GOD'S GRACE IS PRESENT, THE FULNESS OF IT MAY BE WAITED FOR. 1. *What is the essential element in grace?* Is it not the consciousness of acceptance with God? The child of God knows that he is such, and that therefore he is the subject of gracious influences from the Holy Spirit, and heir of all that is truly

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good. 2. *It is in view of this that present circumstances are to be interpreted.* The good as well as the evil. Our true, eternal blessedness lies beyond our greatest present happiness, amongst the "things prepared." Our anxiety should be, not for immediate possessions, but for meetness for the inheritance, and for entering in by the right way.—M.

Ver. 3.—*The character of the Divine love inferred from its history.* I. ITS HISTORY 1. *It was self-declared.* A free, spontaneous *promise* on God's part. This revelation was itself a grace, as the actual sentiment of God toward Israel might have been concealed. By the circumstances of its declaration all doubt was removed, and it became a fundamental article of Jewish faith, and a factor of Jewish life and national development. 2. *It existed from the very first.* (Cf. Deut. iv. 37; x. 15.) The dealings of God with Abraham, and with the children of Israel in Egypt, proved this. Anticipating the beginnings of spiritual life: "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John iv. 19; cf. Rom. iv. 9—12). 3. *It was constant and unceasing.* With this truth the Israelites were familiar. Too often they had presumed upon it. But the continued existence of such a little nation in the midst of its great neighbours was nothing less than a miracle of watchful, unceasing, Divine love. 4. *The same favour is extended to the Babylonian exiles.* It comes to them freely as it came to their ancestors. Through them the same purpose of love would work, and their misfortunes would be overruled for ultimate blessing.

II. ITS CHARACTER AS INFERRED FROM THIS. A love like this was as remarkable as it was vast, and had to be accounted for. A misunderstanding of its character had frequently involved the Jews in national crimes and disasters. 1. *It was gracious and undeserved.* There was nothing in the fathers to create such an affection; as little was there anything in themselves. And even if there had, the constancy of it throughout so many ages of idolatry and wickedness demonstrated that it could not be the reward of human desert. 2. *It was merciful and righteous in its purpose.* This it was which sanctified it and endued it with such moral power. A love of delight and complacency, independently of the character of those upon whom it was bestowed, would have been weak and reprehensible. But the enduring mercy of God, whilst it is a continual reproof to the impenitent, is full of encouragement and help to the weakest soul that truly seeks for righteousness. The misfortunes of Israel were as much the proofs of that love as the prosperity; the one consistent purpose of redemption stringing together the most diverse historic experiences. Did he choose Israel? it was that they "should be holy."—M.

Ver. 6.—*The unity of the Church.* Ephraim represented the ten tribes of Israel, and Jerusalem the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, the sections of the divided kingdom. In days to come this division was to be healed, as the "watchmen" or prophets of Israel would lead their people to the temple at Jerusalem.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITY AMONGST GOD'S PEOPLE IS SHOWN BY THE PROMINENCE GIVEN TO IT IN THIS PROPHECY. Dissension and strife between the followers of truth is not only an unseemly spectacle, it is productive of misery and ruin. Judah and the ten tribes were too jealous of one another to unite in works of defence or internal administration. The rival temples of Gerizim and Jerusalem were mischievous in their influence, and, as time would accentuate differences, there would be danger of the common truth being forgotten. The unity of the Church must ever be important to those whose hearts are filled with the love of God. Christ's prayer (John xvii. 21) shows how dear the thought is to the purest and best. The children of God should be bound together in the closest bonds of sympathy and love. Only thus will their efforts to evangelize the world be successful, and the glory of the kingdom of God be realized on earth.

II. BY WHAT INFLUENCES WAS IT TO BE BROUGHT ABOUT? That there were various causes tending to this result is evident to every student of sacred history. But chief amongst these were: 1. *The events of providence,* by which they discovered, amidst exile and misery, a common brotherhood and faith, and attained to: 2. *A more intense spiritual aim and life.* The desire to meet with God overcame all prejudice and difference, and revealed the true unity of Israel. The nearer they were to God the nearer

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they became to one another, and the more they delighted in assembling together (Ezra iii. 1; Isa. ii. 3; Micah iv. 2). 3. *God was to manifest himself in the person of his Son at Jerusalem.* To the temple, then, all eyes were increasingly turned as the appointed time drew on. 4. *Through Christ's connection with the temple, local holy places were abolished, and men sought God through him.* (John iv. 21.)—M.

Vers. 10—14.—*The redemption of Israel a great and notable event.* It is to be proclaimed as of universal import and consequence. The scattering of Israel may be alluded to in speaking of "the nations" and "the isles," or these may be addressed simply as onlookers of the mighty drama. What happens to God's people must concern the whole world.

I. AS AN EXHIBITION OF DIVINE GRACE AND POWER. (Vers. 10, 11.) 1. *It betokened the restoration of God's favour.* (Ver. 10.) The term of punishment was to draw to a close, and the era of reconciliation to commence. Just as he had "scattered" the Israelites, now he was about to recall them to Canaan. In the one act, as in the other, the Divine intervention and its moral significance would be made manifest. The greatest judgments of God on earth have their limits. "He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever." How carefully should the times of Divine discipline and reconciliation be observed by those who are concerned in them! 2. *The power of God would be displayed in it.* (Vers. 10, 11; cf. ver. 8.) As Sovereign. The words used, "He that scattered Israel will gather him," would seem to mean—he that scattered Israel would alone know where to discover them again. The figure of a shepherd and his flock is also suggestive of skill and authority. As the restored unity and national life of Israel were to be a marvellous phenomenon, much more would the spiritual unity of God's people throughout the world, of which the former was but the prototype. "The Lord knoweth them that are his." Another proof of the Divine power was afforded in the fact that Israel was to be delivered from one "that was stronger than he." The power of Nebuchadnezzar was to be broken. So the world-power which prevents the true freedom and unity of the Church from being realized will be destroyed. Indeed, already Christ has declared himself as "him that overcometh the world;" and in view of this the "little flock" are not to be dismayed. The day is coming when all enemies will be put under the feet of Christ, the Lord of the Church.

II. AS RESULTING IN NATIONAL AND SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY. (Vers. 12—14.) It was not only to be a restoration of the people to their own land. God does nothing by halves. The industry, social and national development, and the spiritual life of Israel would be abundantly blessed. 1. *The well-being of God's people is viewed as connected.* The spiritual with the material, and the material with the spiritual. There is no austerity in the religion of the restored, and yet their life is full of the spirit and practice of religion. The blessing of God upon the fruits of the earth is gratefully recognized, and as with a common thankfulness the people "flow together" to the great festivals of the temple. It is only as men exhibit this spirit—the spirit of righteousness and thankfulness—that the earth will yield the fulness of her increase. Other things being equal, the good man will succeed better than the wicked, even in secular pursuits. "Godliness is profitable unto all things," etc. (1 Tim. iv. 8). 2. *It is to be complete and glorious.* How spontaneous the piety of the redeemed! In the picture here sketched we seem to catch a glimpse of the fulness of the millennial joy. It is a state of overflowing, ecstatic blessedness. The religious and the secular pursuits of men are to be harmonized. Age is to forget its weakness, and the bereaved their grief. The Church is to share in the general prosperity, and, as a consequence of the efficiency and fervour of its ministrations, the people are to be "satisfied with my goodness." When shall this vision of human life in its wholeness and its glory be realized? Our own times exhibit few signs of such a golden age. Yet the Word of the Lord has spoken it, and we should with patience both labour and look for its fulfilment.—M.

Vers. 15—17.—"*Rahel weeping for her children.*" The great mother of Israel and Judah is represented by a figure as mourning over the desolation of the land. God comforts the sorrow thus occasioned by a promise greater than could be fulfilled in the return of the Babylonian captivity. Rahel was an ancestress of the Old Testament

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Church, whose spirit she might be said to personify. The Church of Christ may still be said to weep for her children, and to be comforted by the promises of God. Matthew's reference to this passage is only accommodative—a spiritual and not a literal parallel. We may understand the passage, therefore, as representative of—

I. THE SORROW OF THE CHURCH. 1. *Its occasion.* The loss of her sons and daughters through sin, alienation, or death. Especially might this apply in times of spiritual sterility and worldly influence. The Church cannot look upon the indifference or hostility of her legitimate children without grief. 2. *Its intensity.* Loud and bitter, as of one not to be consoled. The blessing of which she is bereft promised to be so great; the consequences to the "banished ones" themselves may be so serious. Are Christ's people sufficiently alive to the losses which are continually inflicted upon his communion through worldliness or particular sins? 3. *Its character.* Ver. 16, "Thy *work*." Energy has been put forth. All her resources have been exhausted in vain efforts for the recovery of the exiles. In the first instance our concern for the "banished ones" should lead us to persistent and manifold effort for their restoration; and when that fails, we must cast ourselves in lamentation and prayer before God. In this way our sorrow shall prove to be a "work," in a double sense.

II. HER CONSOLATION. 1. *The restoration of the lost ones is promised.* This would be the only adequate comfort for those who mourn over dear ones as spiritually dead. God's scheme of redemption is greater than our utmost hopes or preparations. 2. *This will in a sense be the reward of her work.* When direct and immediate efforts have failed, a further Divine grace will prove effectual. The children of the Church are beneath the eye of God, who will lead them back again from the captivity of sin, and even from the sepulchres of spiritual death. The labours and prayers of the faithful shall not be in vain in the Lord. The unity of spiritual labour in the past, present, and future (cf. John iv. 37, 38). 3. *God himself comforts her even now.* In his "exceeding great and precious promises." By the Spirit of hope. By the gradual realization of the fruits of salvation. The end is made very real and bright through faith.—M.

Vers. 18—21.—*Ephraim bemoaning himself; or, the penitent's restoration.* The exiled Israelites are represented as about to grieve over their apostasy, and to seek God in confession and prayer. The answer of God is full of mercy and encouragement. The Captivity is to be brought back, and the cities of Israel are to be again occupied.

I. THE STAGES AND PROCESSES OF TRUE REPENTANCE. (Vers. 18, 19.) 1. *Conviction and acknowledgment of sin.* The unbroken steer a forcible metaphor, but not stronger than the circumstances warrant. How stupid and heinous our offences seem when once we see them in God's light! It is *sin* that is bemoaned, not mere misfortune or pain; and the wrong done to the Divine character by our unbelief and misconception. 2. *Prayer for conversion.* The stubborn resister of God's commands is now consciously helpless to convert himself. He feels how necessary the power and grace of God to "turn" him. 3. *The complete work of repentance is now accomplished.* Sorrow for past sins and shame for inward depravity are felt as never before. With deeper knowledge of God's mercy and his own sin, the sinner attains to more intense sorrow and shame. "Smote upon my thigh" (cf. Ezek. xxi. 12; Homer, 'Iliad,' xv. 113: xvi. 124).

II. GOD'S ANSWER TO THE PENITENT. (Vers. 20, 21.) He prophesies this experience from afar; he represents himself as overhearing it. The first beginnings of grace in the heart, although invisible to human eyes, are noted by our heavenly Father. 1. *Complacency, sympathy, and mercy are awakened in the Divine mind.* 2. *Encouragement is given.* By *promise of salvation*, and by *directions* as to the way by which sinners are to return (ver. 21). 3. *God declares his own readiness to receive us.* He will go forth like the father of the prodigal.—M.

Vers. 31—34.—*The new covenant.* Religion is only possible and of advantage as based upon an understanding between man and God. The perpetuation of the word "covenant," in the New as well as in the Old Testament, shows how essential this idea is. And God's infinite mercy and royal condescension is shown in instituting a new covenant when the old was "ready to vanish away."

I. AS RESULTING FROM THE OLD COVENANT. 1. *It was necessitated by past failure.*

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The first covenant had been repeatedly and flagrantly broken. As a system of morals, it was perfect and without flaw; but human nature, being corrupt, was unable to keep its conditions (Rom. vii. 12). Universal corruption witnessed to the hopelessness of salvation by such a method. And yet the transgressions of men were not thereby excused. The essential depravity of man was revealed in a stronger and more definite character; but it already existed, and was an occasion of the Divine anger. As the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews phrases it, God, "finding fault with them" (Heb. viii. 8) reminds Judah and Israel of his delivering mercy ("I took them by the hand," etc.), and declares his constancy and uninterrupted tenderness ("I was an *husband*," etc.). 2. *It illustrated Divine mercy.* In strict justice the transgressors of the Law had no claim to any consideration. They had incurred the righteous displeasure of God. But his merciful purpose was not laid aside. Another opportunity of salvation was afforded, and when the first covenant failed, a second covenant was designed of grander conception and more universal adaptation. The love of God, affronted, does not withdraw itself, but busies itself with new schemes to supplement human frailty and diminish the occasions and possibilities of failure.

II. IN ITS DISTINCTIVE DIFFERENCE FROM IT. It is evident from this description that the gospel dispensation is referred to. The characteristics of the new covenant are mentioned as differing from those of the old in: 1. *Inwardness.* A form of speech signifying that the Law would be rooted in the affections of men, and grow up within them as a second nature. Paul, whilst conscious of the condemnation of the Law, yet approved it as "holy, and just, and good." No longer will it be a limiting, restraining influence acting from without, but an impulse and inspiration from within. It is much the same in effect as when God promises to give his Spirit to men. And, indeed, a work like this—the new birth—as it is beyond the power of man, must be effected by the power of God. He will reveal himself to them by an inward experience. 2. *Universality.* A revelation of this kind will naturally be more extensive than one which appeals first to the intellect. Being spiritual and experimental, it will anticipate and underlie intellectual apprehension. The child and the unlearned person will thereby be placed on an equality with the scholar and the wise man. Yet is not this light given to Israel, or Judah, or to any others, apart from their own voluntary acceptance of it. It is to be distinguished from the natural light of conscience as involving a voluntary submission of the will to the revealed will of God, and as originating in the recognition of a new filial relation between the soul and God. Thus it is said, "He will reveal himself to them as he does not unto the world." And because of the supernatural character of this revelation, "the least" are placed at an advantage relatively to "the greatest;" for "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" (1 Cor. i. 26). The possession of this Divine illumination will of itself constitute a man a citizen of the new Israel, of which it is an essential feature that all its constituents shall know God. 3. *Absoluteness and duration.* "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Acceptance with God is, therefore, final and complete. Under the new covenant the sins of the redeemed are not only *forgiven*, but *forgotten;* not only *cancelled*, but "*blotted out* as a morning cloud" (Isa. xliv. 22); not only *removed from before his face*, but "*cast behind his back into the depths of the sea*" (Micah vii. 19). Under the Levitical priesthood, offering for sins had frequently to be made, being in itself powerless to take them away; but Christ's sacrifice, being of absolute avail with God, would only have to be once offered in order "to perfect for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. x. 14).—M.

Ver. 34.—*Missions put an end to.* Many persons, at the outset of modern missionary enterprise, strongly objected to it upon various pleas, but chiefly as an interference with providential arrangements and an opposition to the will of God. Even now there are some who regard it as a quixotic and presumptuous folly. It may console such persons to know that even the Bible looks forward to the abolition of missions. But in a very different way from theirs!

I. THE MEANS BY WHICH THIS IS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED. 1. *What it is.* Communication of the knowledge of God. Not by one act or word, but in a sustained and continuous way. By careful and intelligent explanation of God's character, laws, and purpose; even more by realizing in one's own life and behaviour the love and grace of

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God. Every life ought to be a revelation of God. 2. *Where it is to be applied.* The important thing to observe here is the point of departure. Our eyes are not to be in the ends of the earth. The persons upon whom our first efforts are to be put forth are close beside us—our "brother" and our "neighbour." This describes an immediate and direct responsibility. How many have fulfilled it? Some such work as this was done when the Jews returned from the Exile, without teachers numerous or learned enough for the instruction of the people in the Law. The scribes of the great synagogue gave themselves to the work, making itinerant journeys throughout Israel and Judah at stated intervals. But this was not sufficient, and so it had to be supplemented by popular and domestic efforts. Happily the people were enthusiastic and earnest, and, literally, every man taught his brother and his neighbour. This was but a prelude to the work which the Church of Christ has to take up. The missionaries and ministers of the cross are to "go everywhere" preaching the Word. But that will not suffice. Multitudes are hungering for the truth as it is in Christ—multitudes whom we personally may never hope to reach. What, then, can we do? We can tell our brother and our neighbour—in that way the tidings of salvation will spread; and others more at liberty and more enterprising may be encouraged by our zeal and liberality to go forth to heathen nations. In any case the first quarter to which the Church should look for increase is *within itself.* The language is explicit, and no man need waste his time in inquiring, "Who is my neighbour?" The parable of the good Samaritan has settled that matter for all time.

II. THE EVIDENCE THAT IT IS ACCOMPLISHED. 1. *Universal knowledge of God.* The gospel is intended for all men. Every man has a personal interest in its message. To keep back the truth from any one who has come within our reach is a sin; especially is this the case with regard to those who are our daily companions and closest friends. The words are not satirical, but a gracious promise. It is an end towards which we should hopefully and constantly aim. Some day it will be realized; "for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. xi. 9; Hab. ii. 14). *So long as one soul is ignorant of God, we are bound to continue the work.* 2. *Universal experience of the blessings of salvation.* It is no speculative abstraction we have to communicate, but a "word" which has in it the power to awaken, convert, and reconcile eternally to God. This knowledge of him is therefore experimental and practical. It will not leave men as it finds them. It will purify and redeem, and introduce them to the blessedness of a complete and enduring salvation. God will seal the labours of his servants by "signs following"—by righteous and holy fruits, and by the assurance that the sins of them that believe through their teaching will be forgiven for ever.—M.

Vers. 38—40.—*The new Jerusalem.* The law or condition of the spiritual life of the future having been referred to, the organized embodiment or community to which they will give rise is next described. This will be—

I. THE ANTITYPE OF THE OLD JERUSALEM. 1. *An organized community.* With permanent constitution and laws, and subject to a central authority. Comprehending and unifying the manifold relations of human life. A true "city of God" on earth. 2. *With an earthly manifestation.* It would not be a mere idea, but would realize itself, in part at least, in sensible forms and external manifestations. It would be the incarnation of spiritual principles and their practical realization. 3. *And a sacred character.* This would be its distinguishing characteristic, as it had been that of the former city. There would be a wall of consecration, and a special aim and direction given to the life, of which it would be the dwelling-place and home. It would be built "to the Lord," and would in its entirety be "holy to the Lord."

II. CONTRASTED WITH IT. 1. *More complete in its surroundings and defences.* Jehoash had destroyed the wall in the north and north-east, in the reign of Amaziah. On this side, therefore, the old city was most defenceless. A large portion of this was rebuilt by Nehemiah (iii. 1), but probably not the whole. The new city will be entirely rebuilt and thoroughly defended, "a city compact and built together." 2. *More comprehensive.* Outlying places would be included, and the bounds of the city vastly extended. The whole earth will be included in the city of salvation. 3. *More inclusively consecrated.* The hill Gareb (perhaps that of the lepers), and the hill Goath

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(possibly Golgotha), and the valley of Hinnom, the foul Gehenna—even these which had confronted the old city as a reproach, would be cleansed, transformed, and included. The sources of disease and the occasions of defilement would thus be entirely removed. 4. *More permanent in its duration.* It is to be preserved from all injury, and is to stand for ever.

III. WHOLLY DISTINCT FROM IT. At no time in the history of Israel were these predictions fulfilled with regard to the earthly Jerusalem. Portions of the description might appear to correspond with what took place in the time of Nehemiah and others, but in its entirety it is evident that the city here spoken of is utterly distinct from the geographical and historical Jerusalem. It is associated with it according to the law of Divine continuity, but in itself it is a new creation. The "wall great and high" is of no earthly material; the extension is not one of yards or miles, but of nations and ages; the consecration of the unclean places is but typical of the regenerative force of Christianity, which reclaims the moral wastes of the world, and purifies the carnal affections and sinful tendencies of human nature; and no material city could ever "stand for aye." Only the kingdom and Church of Christ could satisfy the conditions of such a prophecy.—M.

Vers. 1—9.—*The restoration of Israel.* To cheer the hearts of the exiles, to lift up the despondent, and to vindicate the faithfulness of God, is the intent of this and the many other predictions concerning the restoration of Israel. In a limited sense they were fulfilled by the restoration at the close of the Captivity; but the events of that period can hardly be said to have filled up the meaning of the emphatic language which the prophets were wont to employ. Hence it has been felt to be necessary to look further for the complete fulfilment of these many most glorious predictions. And in the yet future restoration of Israel, in the gathering home to their own land again in all their national entirety, not a few see the real meaning of the prophets' words. Others, whilst clearly seeing that the return of the exiles from Babylon could not satisfy the inspired Word, find that which more than meets the case in the restoration of humanity at large—in that which our Saviour called "the regeneration," and St. Peter "the restitution of all things," and St. Paul "the gathering of all things in one, even in Christ." And, as in a microcosm, we may see in the redemption of every individual soul the varied characteristics which shall be more broadly and conspicuously displayed when these prophetic utterances shall have their perfect fulfilment in the kingdom of God. In the above verses (1—9) some of these characteristics are indicated; *e.g.*—

I. ITS AUTHOR. This is the Lord. See how in all these opening verses this fact is emphatically proclaimed. In ver. 1 it is the Lord who declareth that he "will be the God," etc; in the second verse "the Lord" speaks, saying, "I caused him to rest;" in the third the Lord it is who declares to his servant the unchanging love which is at the root of all this restoration; and in ver. 4 it is again, "*I* will build thee," etc. Let these prophecies be understood as they may, the blessings of which they tell are every one of them due to the Lord alone, whether we apply them to the return from exile, the national restoration of Israel yet to come, the redemption of humanity, or to the individual soul. He is the gracious Author of every such restoration, and to him is the praise to be given.

II. THE BLESSINGS OF SUCH RESTORATION. There will be: 1. *Gladness and joy.* (Cf. vers. 4, 7.) Under the imagery of a festive dance the prophet declares this. The mournful monotone of humanity's sorrow, its ceaseless moan, shall be replaced by the song, the dance, the shout of joy. 2. *Peace.* For centuries the vine-clad hills of Samaria had been the object of the marauder's repeated attack; invasion after invasion had fallen upon "the planters" that planted there. But now, undisturbed, unmolested, they shall not merely plant, but eat the fruit of their vines. It is an image of unruffled peace which arises from the perfect security in which God's people shall for ever dwell. In the turmoil of life, amid its tossings to and fro, and its painful agitations, there are not a few to whom the thought of this blessed peace is the chief charm of the hoped-for future. 3. *Unity.* (Ver. 6.) The watchmen of Ephraim, who were stationed on the high mountains to proclaim the advents of the feasts and festivals of God's people, shall cry, "Arise ye, and let us go up to *Zion.*" What a change here from the old sad

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past! Then Israel would not worship in Zion, but stood aloof in her own worship within her own borders. But now Israel and Judah shall go together to worship in Zion. Not discord now, but blessed unity. It can hardly be questioned that the spirit of strife, which is an all but universal feature in human character, and never has been wanting in vigorous expression, must have been designed for some good end. But who will not welcome the day when it can be done without, and the nations shall learn war no more? 4. *God shall be all and in all.* The going up to Zion shall be "to the Lord our God." This fact is the key-stone of the whole arch of promise and of blessing. Without it all would crumble away, could have no existence, still less permanence.

III. ITS PROCESS. 1. The proclamation of God's grace is made. Faith to believe it is given. Then and thence "praise" to God for his goodness and "prayer" pleading with God to make good his word. "O Lord, save," etc. (ver. 7). 2. Then God actually proceeds to bring them away from the many lands where they are scattered. Distance is no obstacle (ver. 8). Their own infirmities shall not hinder (ver. 8). The dreadful desert, with its thirst, its pathless extent, its rough rock-strewn ways, shall not hinder; for (ver. 9) God shall give them "rivers of waters," and "a straight way wherein they shall not stumble." 3. We see them approaching their own land: "They shall come with weeping," etc. (ver. 9). It is the sense of God's goodness that more than aught besides leads to that godly sorrow which is the sure guarantee of complete abandonment of those sins which in the past had brought such evil upon them, and which, until abandoned, would render restoration impossible.

IV. THE REASON AND MOTIVE OF IT. Ver. 9, "For I am Israel's Father," etc. It is this fact of the fatherhood of God that explains the darkest experiences of life, for such experiences are God's disciplines, the pruning of the vine, etc. And it enables us to sustain them and warrants the highest and most blessed hopes for those who are called upon to endure them. God's fatherhood is at the same time the most awful and the most blessed fact the soul can know. Let us see to it that, by loving obedience to his will, we know only the Father's smile and escape the Father's frown.—C.

Ver. 1.—*The steps of the kingdom of God.* "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people." Day by day we pray, "Thy kingdom come," and what that means the next sentence of the prayer tells us. It is that God's will should be done on earth as it is done in heaven. All blessedness for man is contained in the fulfilment of this prayer, even as all man's misery is due to its non-fulfilment. But how do we expect the kingdom of God to come? By what means will the blessed condition of God's will being perfectly done on earth be brought about? The answer which is commonly given is that, by means of the preaching of the gospel and the consequent conversion of the ungodly world, the kingdom of God shall come. Hence the prayer is perpetually put up that God would send his Spirit, and make his Word powerful in men's conversion. Now, God forbid that any should disparage such work, or do aught other than desire most earnestly that the preaching of God's Word may be far, far more successful to this end than it commonly is. Would that the Church might win from the world far more numerous converts than have yet been given to her! God speed the work of conversion! But it is not by this means alone that the coming of God's kingdom is to be brought about. There is another, a more ancient, and we may also say a more scriptural and therefore more successful way, and that is *by the increase of godly families.* When God is the God of all the families in Israel, then the nation shall be his people. The family, the Church, the kingdom of God,—these are the successive steps by which, according to the Scriptures, it is the Divine intent to bring in the kingdom.

I. THE FAMILY. God has not taken means to secure the perpetuation of any special political, ecclesiastical, or social institutions, but he has determined that, whilst these may come and go, the institution of the family shall abide. Therefore from the beginning "God made man in his own image," "male and female created he them." The Divine ideal contained this twofold element. And he has also ordered it that the one should be in all respects the complement of the other, and as such should mutually seek and delight in the companionship of the other. And to their union he gave the blessed gift of children and the love that accompanies them, and so amid all the vicissitudes of nations and governments, the institution of the family has been

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perpetuated; that has not perished, whatever else may have. And there results from all this the formation of a certain spirit and type of character. There are family likenesses, not in feature and form only, but in mental, moral, and physical characteristics as well. And these enlarge and become characteristics of whole tribes, races, nations. It is evident, therefore, that, in the institution of the family, there is present a propagating power for whatever moral and spiritual forces the heads of such family may be themselves possessed with. Abraham, God knew, would be sure to "order his household" after him. And to this day the characteristics of the Jewish race are discernible everywhere. Moral and spiritual forces travel along this road rather than any other. It is God's great highway for those principles which, when fully embraced by men's hearts, shall bring in the kingdom of God itself. And it is by the natural increase of the family that God designs his truth should spread and his way come to be known upon earth, and his saving health amongst all nations. But ere this be accomplished the family will have developed into—

II. THE CHURCH. This will be the further step in the coming of the kingdom of God. When one and another household are possessed of a common spirit, share a common faith and hope, and render obedience to one Divine law, it is in accordance with all spiritual instincts that these should meet together for their mutual comfort, edification, and support. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another." And so strong has been in all ages the force of this spiritual instinct, that no fear of persecution, no terror that their enemies could inflict, has been able to deter those who believed in God from thus meeting together. There need have been no martyrs, or scarce any, if the faithful would but have individually kept their opinions to themselves. But spiritual force cannot be dammed in and held back. It will be sure ere long to burst through all restraints and barriers and go its own way. But this irrepressible instinct has been the cause and creator of the Church. And such holy convocations have reacted on the family and deepening the hold of those sacred principles which first drew the members of the Church together have made more firm the faith and hope which already existed. Thus by the Church the spirit of the family is not only preserved, but strengthened, and its perpetuation and reproduction made more certain in the future. And the process goes on. Divine principles, faith in God, fear and love of his Name, established in the family, expand and develop into the Church, and there slowly, with ever-accelerating force, surely and irresistibly, they make their way until at length it will be seen that the godly seed has the start of the seed of the wicked one, and is ever pushing it out of the way, driving it forth from its long-held but usurped dominion. In illustration of this see how the Christian races do even now inherit the earth. The Puritans of America, the colonies that are ever being founded by our own people. See, too, how the Jews have ever held their own—what tenacity of life, what spiritual force, are inherent in them. These are but illustrations, and but feeble ones, of how spiritual force, if it take possession of the family, will live and spread and grow until the mustard shall become the goodly tree. And thus—rather than by occasional conversions from the ranks of the worldly—does it seem God's mind and will that the coming of—

III. THE KINGDOM OF GOD should be brought about. "There is an established hereditary moral connection between parents and their offspring, and every known principle of reason, of justice, and of holiness suggests that this connection exists for purposes of good, and not exclusively for purposes of evil." "The character of the family lies at the very foundation of all permanent moral improvement in the human race generally, and in Christian Churches in particular; and until it be intelligently, and, under the influence of right principles, practically attended to, all the preaching and all the religious machinery with which we are furnished will fail, as they have hitherto failed, to improve materially the moral condition of the world." As Baxter says, "The preaching of the Word by public ministers is not the first ordinary means of grace to any but those that were graceless till they came to hear such preaching; that is, to those on whom the first appointed means—godly nurture in the family—hath been neglected or proved vain. I doubt not to affirm that a godly education is God's first and ordinary appointed means for the begetting of actual faith and other graces in the children of believers. Public preaching is appointed for the conversion of those only that have missed the blessing of the first appointed means." Yes; let God be the

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God of our families, and he will soon become the God of our nation, the God of the whole human race, and his kingdom will have come, and his will be done on earth as it is done in heaven.—C.

Ver. 2.—*Troubles lessened by increase.* "The people which were . . . wilderness." The sword by which Israel had been decimated, her ranks thinned, her homes desolated —what a trouble was that! And now it is to be followed by "the wilderness"—that "waste howling wilderness" so vividly described by Moses (Deut. i. 19; viii. 15; xxxii. 10). This would seem another, a new, a sore trouble, but it was to be the means of healing the wound caused by the first. Cf. "I have given the valley of Achor for a door of hope" (Hos. ii. 15).

I. THE MEANING OF THESE WORDS. It is not easy to say certainly what sword and what wilderness the prophet had in his mind when he thus wrote. Perhaps the sword of Pharaoh and the wilderness of Sinai. Yet more likely the sword of their Babylonian conquerors; and the wilderness, that great Syrian desert across which they must travel on their homeward way—a wilderness far more deserving of the dread epithets which Moses applied to the wilderness of Sinai. Or the wilderness may mean the whole condition of the Jews in their exile, the deep sorrow, shame, and distress which their captivity seemed to threaten them with.

II. But, let it be understood how it may, THE PROPHETIC STATEMENT IS TRUE. In the wilderness of Sinai what grace God's people found there! Blessings in basket and in store, in guidance, governance, guardianship; in instruction, discipline, and development as a nation: how they were welded together, trained for duty, qualified for the high honour God designed for them! And in the wilderness which they had to cross on their return from their exile, infested, then as now, with robber tribes, to whom their comparatively scant numbers, their unwarlike character, and above all their treasures of gold and silver destined for the temple of God, would offer an irresistible temptation, how could the exiles have escaped this peril of the wilderness, to say nothing of many others, but for the grace of God? It was emphatically true that they "found grace in the wilderness." Those dreary leagues of burning sand, the awful dangers of the way, might well have daunted them, and no doubt did deter the majority of the people from all attempt at return; for it was but a remnant that came back. But all these perils were surmounted. Day after day for four months the caravan of the exiles crept along the wilderness way. "Unlike that of Sinai, it was diversified by no towering mountains, no delicious palm groves, no gushing springs. A hard gravel plain from the moment they left the banks of the Euphrates till they reached the northern extremity of Syria, with no solace except the occasional wells and walled stations. Ferocious hordes of Bedouin robbers then, as now, swept the whole trail." But like their great ancestor, "they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came." "They," as he, "found grace in the wilderness." And so abundant was that grace that their perilous enterprise became a veritable march of triumph. "The redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away." "As before some royal potentate, there would go before them an invisible Protector, who should remove the hard stones from the bare feet of those that ran beside the camels, and cast them up in piles on either side to mark the broad track seen for miles along the desert." (Cf. Isa. xl. 1—4, for description of this grace found in the wilderness.) And so what seemed so sore a trouble added on to the sword of the exile, was in reality the healing of the wound caused by that sword. But this is often the Divine plan. The second trouble heals the first, and so trouble is lessened by increase. Note—

III. FURTHER ILLUSTRATIONS. The plague of London was followed by the fire, but that fire purged the city as nothing else could, and no such plague has visited it since. In medical science it is well known how often one disease is driven out by another. In the hot, close valleys of mountainous lands the wild storm is welcomed, notwithstanding its fierce might, overturning and destroying in ruthless manner, for it purges the whole atmosphere and drives away the seeds of disease and death. The heat was terrible, and the storm, but the second trouble lessened the first. To have to leave Paradise and to go out into a wilderness in which thorns and briars should abound

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was another trouble, but the labour the second demanded was to be the healing force whereby the first loss should be lessened and the curse turned into a blessing. What a tissue of troubles Jacob's life seems to have been made up of! and yet once and again the new trouble healed the old. The imprisonment of his sons in Egypt led to his recovery of his lost son Joseph. Death follows on disease. Ah! what a new trouble is death in instances not a few! but in that wilderness of the grave what grace the departed soul finds there! Take our Lord's illustration of the birth of children: how the last sorrows of the birth-throes, the dread hour of travail, because thereby a new life is born, are with all the pain that went before forgotten, "remembered no more"! And in things spiritual the law of our text is true. The prodigal's outward misery was followed by the inward pangs of shame, remorse, and sorrow. But they led to the "I will arise and go," etc. And to a renewed soul what misery there is in the return of temptation! and if it have overcome the soul, what yet greater misery haunts the soul then! "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord." But that new distress is to render the recurrence of the first less and less possible, and by-and-by impossible. In God's providential ordering of our affairs, this same law is often shown. The straitened means that follow bereavement of the bread-winner of the household—that poverty often develops character, compels the mind to turn from perpetual brooding over its loss, which it is so apt to do, draws forth sympathy of friends, and in innumerable ways works good. "All things" do, as a fact, "work together for good to them that love God."

IV. THE PHILOSOPHY OF THIS. (Cf. Rom. v. 3, 4.) The outward ills may not always be removed, but their power to do aught else than bless the believer is taken away. Instead of casting him down, they lead him into the full possession of that hope, having which the soul is independent of all that man or hell can do against it.

V. ITS LESSON. If "the wilderness" should follow "the sword," we need not fear; that is to say, if a second sorrow should come upon the steps of a former one, we may regard it as a probable means of lessening the former, and not increasing it. The long sorrow of no Isaac born to Abraham was followed by the awful command to slay him; but that led to an issue that swallowed up in glory and joy all the darkness and sorrow of all the past, and lit up all the future of the long ages to come with a light whose radiance is as bright to-day as ever. Then let our song be, "Father, I wait *thy* daily will," etc.—C.

Ver. 3.—*The love of God.* In these chapters, the thirtieth and the thirty-first, we have a delightful change from the prolonged accusations, warnings, and threatenings which form the staple of well-nigh all that has gone before. Here we have a series of good and comfortable words designed for the encouragement of God's people in the midst of the sorrows of their exile. This verse declares that the love of God was the real cause of all that had befallen his people. Now—

I. WITHOUT DOUBT THERE WAS MUCH IN THEIR HISTORY THAT SEEMED TO BE VERY CONTRARY TO WHAT LOVE WOULD DO. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love," said God. "What!" we can imagine a perplexed soul exclaiming—"What! love, everlasting love, and Israel a scattered people, her throne overturned, her kings slain or in exile, her people perished by tens of thousands, her temple and city burnt with fire, her lot so exceeding hard, bitter, and hopeless! Where is the love in all this?" And so it is still. It is hard to persuade men to believe in the love of God; to understand how, under the omnipotent rule of a beneficent and loving God, these many things can be which we know by experience are—pain, loss, disappointment, death, and yet worse, moral evil, sin in all its forms; and the darkness in which we continue in regard to all these. Who can understand all this, or adequately explain the great mysteries of human life?

II. BUT NEVERTHELESS GOD'S LOVE IS AT THE ROOT OF ALL THINGS. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" was true for Israel and is true for us. For note in regard to Israel: 1. *The purpose of God towards them was such as love only would cherish.* What of honour and glory and blessing did God not design for his people! The whole of the Scriptures teem with his promises and declarations as to this. They were to be his people and he would be their God, in all the fulness of blessed meaning that such an assurance intends. 2. *And there was no other way whereby his gracious*

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ends could be secured, less painful than that which he had been constrained to adopt. We may be sure of this; for the same love that first formed the gracious purpose would be certain to choose the most direct and happy means to secure it. For: 3. *It was in the power of Israel*—a power which they exercised with fatal effect for themselves—*to compel God to take circuitous routes to reach his designed end.* The heart of a people cannot be dealt with as God deals with mere matter. The power of choice, the free-will of man, can baffle for a long time the benevolence of God, and delay and thwart not a little the accomplishment of that on which his heart is set. They would try their own ways, and only when they had found how full of sorrow these were would they consent to God's way. And all this involved long weary years and much and manifold sorrow. 4. *And what was true of Israel is true of mankind at large.* God has purposes of grace for man. He *so* loved the world, and loves it still. But sin can for a while baffle God, and compel the use of the pains and penalties which we see associated with it, in order to eradicate the love of it from the heart of man.

III. NO OTHER KEY SO UNLOCKS THE PROBLEM OF LIFE. If we find it hard at times even with this key, we shall find it much harder with any other. No malignant being would have implanted love in human hearts. The existence of that one blessed principle in man renders the word of the faithless servant, "I knew thee that thou wert a hard man," for ever glaringly untrue. A capricious being would not have established "the reign of love" which we find everywhere. The settled uniformity of the principles on which God's universe is governed disprove that. An indifferent being, such as the Epicureans taught that the gods were, would not have contrived so many means whereby the ease and comfort of his creatures are secured. Only a God of love would be to man what we perpetually see God is to us. The innumerable and palpable proofs of his beneficence affirm this, and when we regard the sorrows and ills of life as but love's sharp remedies, they will not disprove it.

IV. OUR WISDOM IS TO ASSUME, EVEN WHERE WE CANNOT PROVE IT, THAT THIS IS SO. For thus we shall surely come to find more and more "the soul of good" that there is in even the most evil things, and we shall be able to "both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."—C.

Ver. 3.—*God's will done at last.* I. WHAT IS THAT WILL? To gather his children round him. God creates each individual soul only that he may have fresh objects on which to lavish his love. The "dower of blessed children" which God gives to us, he gives because he delights in the possession of children. And the Father of us all wants us to gather around him in the true home of our souls.

II. THE MOTIVE OF THAT WILL. Love. What else can it be?

III. THE FORM IT ASSUMES. Everlasting love. It wears not out, it "hopeth all things, beareth all things, endureth all things."

IV. ITS EXERCISE. Drawing men to himself. How perpetually and by what manifold agencies this is being accomplished! "I, if I be lifted up . . . will *draw* all men unto me," said he who came to do the will of God.

V. THE GREAT POWER WHICH THAT WILL EMPLOYS. Loving-kindness. "With loving-kindness have," etc. Seen most of all in the attraction of the cross of Christ.

VI. THE RESISTANCE IT IMPLIES. There is such resistance—sin.

VII. ITS ULTIMATE RESULT. "I *have* drawn thee." The Father will be able to say that of all his children when Christ's work is finished. "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to his Father, that God may be all in all."—C.

Ver. 10.—*The Scatterer the Gatherer.* "He that scattered Israel," etc. It is possible that there should be *a scattering which has no gathering.* Not seldom we see men squandering every gift and blessing God has endowed them with—time, health, opportunities, friends, etc. And such scattering has often no gathering to follow it, save of the appropriate harvest of ruin whose seed has been so diligently sown. But there may be also a *gathering which has never been preceded by any scattering.* The Father's house may never have been forsaken, the children therein may have grown up in his love and service, without a thought or wish for the far country whither prodigals love to go. As the former fact, the scattering that has no gathering, is the saddest of all, so this latter, the gathering which has known no scattering, is the most blessed

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of all. It is that of those who have lived ever in the love of God; it is that of the holy angels. But there is a *scattering which is followed by a gathering.* Such is spoken of in this verse (10). God was the Author of both in regard to Israel. Let us take—

I. ILLUSTRATIONS OF SUCH PROCEDURE. There is that of the *sower.* He scatters his grain in the furrows, and throws it broadcast o'er the land. But by-and-by he gathers in the rich harvest. *The merchant.* He scatters his wealth in this venture and in that, in the confidence that he shall, in due time, gather large increase of wealth thereby. The *father of a family,* when disease has broken out in the home. The children are sent hither and thither, scattered, but with the intent that when the disease is banished they may all be gathered again without loss or harm. *And God* has scattered the children of men, and the fortunes of men oftentimes, but with the intent of gathering them again. Job. Jacob. Israel's exile. The sending forth and return of our Lord's apostles. The persecution of the Church about Stephen. The whole company of the children of God which are scattered abroad, all to be gathered in at last in the Father's house on high.

II. REASONS OF IT. In the case of such as the sower, etc., these are obvious. But the reasons that influence them in their conduct are akin to those which we may believe order the like Divine procedure. By scattering his people hither and thither broadcast o'er the world, God looks for a harvest from such seed; and how often he has gathered such harvest from such sowing! And the parent's reason—scattering his children to protect them from evil which would have befallen them had they remained together in one place, but purposing to gather them again when the fear of the evil is no more—how much of the painful scatterings which in this life we know and experience may be explained so! When the fire of the foe threatens the massed ranks of an army, the commander scatters his men, bids them take "open order," and so saves them. When the fire ceases, they close up once more. It was to save men from a great sin that God scattered them at Babel. Such divisions and separations are needful now. But he that scattereth will gather.

III. LESSONS. 1. *Submission.* There is wise and good reason for all that now is. What is, is best. 2. *Hope.* Yes; "let our eyes look right on, and our eyelids straight before us." "He that scattereth will gather." Meanwhile: 3. *Obedience.* If God have scattered me or mine, inquire why he has done so. Put yourself in line with God's purposes; for "he always wins who sides with thee."—C.

Ver. 11.—*Strong, stronger, strongest.* Israel, Babylon, God. Note—

I. THE STRONG. Was not Israel so? Regarding Israel as including Judah and Jerusalem, how strong, even materially, was Israel! In her numbers, wealth, fortresses —especially Jerusalem, which was one of the most impregnable of all the cities of the world! in her privileges, memories, promised help of God! in her past prestige and influence! in her long traditions of freedom and greatness! and in much beside! But Israel may be taken as a type of all humanity. Looking upon our first parents, the head of our race, surely we should have thought their position of happiness, holiness, and Divine favour, impregnable. What safeguard did they lack? what motive to withstand the tempter was wanting? And how many there are now who say of themselves, and others think it, that they shall never be moved? Their mountain seems to stand so strong. Lands where pure gospel ministry exists; children of godly homes; men who have long walked in God's ways. But facts all too often show that, "strong" as these may be, there is—

II. THE STRONGER one who overcomes them. The Chaldean armies were too strong for Israel. "The hand of" Babylon "was stronger than he." And the facts of human life all reveal how humanity has come under the cruel dominance of one who is stronger than man. Behold *the body,* a prey to feebleness, disease, pain, and death; *the mind,* to corrupt imagination, to delusion, and deceit; *the affections* clinging to things evil, debased, perverted; *the will* enslaved, made to do that which it would not; *the soul* earth-bound, unable to rise up to God and heaven, as it was made to do. Yes; the evidence is abundant and everywhere that a stronger than man has overcome him to his harm. But this verse tells of deliverance from the hand of this stronger one, by one who is—

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III. THE STRONGEST of all. It came true of Israel, and shall come true again. It is true in regard to humanity and the individual soul. It may be thought, considering the comparatively small number of the exiles who returned to Jerusalem, that this prediction was scarcely verified. But in the increase of the Jewish race in the lands of their exile, in their preservation from the hatred of their enemies (cf. Book of Esther), in the deliverance of them from the snare of idolatry, in the implantation in their hearts of a deeper love and understanding of God's Word,—in all these and in other respects Israel *was* delivered. And humanity *is* redeemed, ransomed. When Christ said, "It is finished," then was virtually accomplished that deliverance for which, in its full realization, the world yet groans. But in every triumph of Divine grace, every conversion, every breaking away from evil, every tightening of the blessed bonds which bind us to Christ, every advance the gospel makes, every missionary triumph, every act of self-consecration, there is present proof of what by-and-by shall be perfectly proved. And the means by which all this is accomplished are suggested to us by the word "ransomed;" it sends our thoughts to him who said of himself that he came to give his life a "ransom for many." Therefore: 1. Let us each look on beyond that mighty one, the prince of this world, who is stronger than we, to him, the Saviour of us all, the Mightiest, who is stronger than he. 2. And ask ourselves the question—Under whose rule and service do we ourselves live? That is the all-important question. God help us to give it the right answer.—C.

Ver. 14.—*Satisfied.* I. THERE IS A SATISFACTION WHICH IS NOT TO BE DESIRED. 1. That of *the worldling*, which says, "Soul, take thine ease," etc. 2. That of *conventionalism.* This looks only to the ordinary standard of religious attainment, and so long as it can come up tolerably near to that standard, it desires no more. They are "at ease in Zion," and the "woe" denounced on such is theirs. 3. Of *Pharisaism*, which thanks God that it is not as other men are. 4. *Of the Stoic*, that has drilled itself not to feel the sorrows of men. 5. Of the *selfish*, which, because it swims, cares not who sinks.

II. BUT THERE IS A SATISFACTION WHICH IS GREATLY TO BE DESIRED. 1. That *of trust*, which prevents all murmuring at the dispensations of God, and which says, "I will trust, and not be afraid." 2. That of *meekness*, which says, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth good in his sight." 3. *That of belief in God's promises in Christ.* "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." 4. That of *experience*—the consciousness that God is carrying on his work within us, deepening the hold of that which is good, loosening more and more the power of that which is evil. Consciousness of growth in grace. But none of these, precious as they are, come up to what is meant here. For it tells us that—

III. THERE IS A SATISFACTION BETTER THAN ALL THESE. It is that of *the realization of the promises of God.* This, not now, but hereafter. In all the kingdom of nature where God has implanted any hunger, he has made provision for its supply. Is the soul of man to be the solitary exception? The seeds obtain their full development ere they die; but not one single soul that God has created ever does so. We cannot be satisfied with either what we know or attain to here. What satisfaction we have is all based on the conviction that we know not, see not, possess not, now; we shall hereafter. See to it, that we be in the road that leadeth to that realization. "I am the Way," said Jesus.—C.

Vers. 15—17.—*Strong consolation.* In this touching passage let us note—

I. THE SCENE. The exiles, with bowed heads and many tears, are being hurried away from their beloved land. Fierce soldiery urge them on. The smoking ruins of their towns, cities, homes, and, above all, of the greatly beloved city of God, Jerusalem, are behind them. A wail of distress goes up from these broken-hearted captives as they stand on the frontier hills of their land, and have to say farewell to it for ever. The whole scene rose up vividly before the prophet, and he seems to see the spirit of Rachel, the genius of their nation, the mother of the tribes on whose border-land the exiles are now standing. She hovers over the sad-hearted company, her face wet with uncontrollable tears, and her lamentations for her poor lost children heard incessantly. She has arisen from her tomb, which was hard by Ramah, and is bewailing the misery of her children.

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II. THE SORROW. It is that of parents for their children. How *intense* this sorrow is! Rachel refuses to be comforted, because her children are not. It is greater than the sorrow of the children. In God's blessed ordering of things, children rarely grieve deeply. They soon forget, as they ought to do. It is not they that grieve, but their parents for them. And if the parents' grief be greater than that of the children, it is greater still than that which the parents feel for themselves. It matters little what becomes of them: it is the children for whom they care. What *a holy* thing this love of parents is! It is by means of this, appealing to it, that "out of the mouths of babes," etc. And how *frequent*, in this weary world of ours! We know how the deep distress of those mothers whose little ones Herod slew recalled the sorrow told of here. The words of the prophet find plentiful application. Not on one ground alone, but on many, parents often have to mourn for their children. But for the people of God there is ever—

III. RICH CONSOLATION. 1. Is the sorrow, as here, *that which is caused by the sight of sore calamity coming upon our children which we cannot ward off?* Oh, how many a father, as he looks around the circle of his children, seems to see a black spectre of care hovering over every one of those curly heads! and the vision sends a chill into his very soul. Their mother is to die, the means of their support is failing, disease has already fastened on some of them; trouble manifold is appointed for them. Their foes are many, their friends few. Now, to all such parents this word of consolation is sent. It tells us how God will care for them if we cannot. His love will never fail, and there is hope for them. Life, after all, will not be to them what we think. O anxious fathers and mothers—and what a crowd of you there are!—trust the God of Israel for your children. 2. Or is it the sorrow *that comes from having prodigal children?* This is a sorrow worse still. But art thou, O parent, a believer in God? dost thou seek him evermore in fervent prayer? Then be assured that he who caused that the prodigal of whom our Saviour tells should "come to himself," will do the like for thine. Never believe that the seed of the godly, for whom earnest prayer is offered, can be ultimately lost. 3. Or is it that you *have been bereaved of your children?* So was it with the mothers at Bethlehem, to whose sorrow St. Matthew applies these words. The salvation of children is as certain as the existence of God himself. To think otherwise would be to render impossible all hope, trust, and love towards God. "Of such is the kingdom of heaven;" "Their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven;" "It is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." True, heartless because childless priests have taught that there is a *limbus infantum*—a children's hell. Good God! that any should believe it! And yet in many districts still the children who die unbaptized are refused Christian burial. But we turn from theologians to God's Word, and clasp the precious promise of these verses to our hearts, as, thank God, we are altogether warranted in doing. Let, then, all to whom God has given children trust him for them—for their bodies' and their souls' welfare, for their well-being in the life that now is and in that which is to come, whilst you continue to bow your knees to "the God and Father . . . in whom *every* family in heaven and earth is named."—C.

Vers. 18, 19.—*Bemoaning one's self.* The very word suggests sorrow, weariness, distress. And all the more when the reason of such bemoaning is not something external to ourselves, as when Rachel wept for her children, but something in ourselves, when we are the cause of our own distress.

I. INQUIRE WHEREFORE THIS BEMOANING. 1. That he had called down upon himself the chastisements of God. 2. That these chastisements had been of no avail. 3. That now it was made evident there was no hope of amendment in himself.

II. COMFORTING THOUGHTS CONCERNING THIS BEMOANING. 1. The Lord surely heard it. Cf. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." 2. There is no attempt to excuse or palliate his sin. 3. That it had led him to despair of help in himself. 4. That in his misery he seeks the Lord. 5. That it was and is the forerunner of genuine conversion.

CONCLUSION. 1. Welcome the smart and pain of sorrow for sin. 2. Dread that apathy which is so common in the slaves of sin. 3. Remember that it is only as the Lord turns us that our conversion is genuine and real.—C.

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Ver. 18.—*Our yokes.* I. That which is hard and yoke-like is appointed for us all.

II. The reason of this appointment is that thereby we may render service which otherwise we could not.

III. That to refuse or resist this yoke will bring down the chastisements of God.

IV. That until we are really turned to God by his grace we shall so resist.

V. We do not cease from such folly without great pain. "I have . . . heard Ephraim *bemoaning* himself."

VI. In that pain is our hope.—C.

Ver. 19.—*Conversion and repentance.* I. BOTH THESE ARE TOLD OF HERE. *Conversion* is. It is spoken of as "being turned" and "instructed." *Repentance* is. It is spoken of plainly, and again figuratively: "I smote upon my thigh." This is a common mode of expressing indignation and grief.

II. AND REPENTANCE IS SAID TO COME AFTER CONVERSION. And this is ever so. Not that there is no repentance prior to conversion. There is, and a genuine one. The "bemoaning" spoken of in the previous verse tells of that repentance which comes prior to conversion. But the true, deep, abiding repentance comes after. It consists, not so much in some passionate outburst of sorrow over sin, but in a settled hatred of it, and a remembrance ever with shame of the time when we allowed ourselves in it. In proportion as we see the love of God in Christ will this repentance deepen. It is in the light of that love that sin takes on its darkest hue. And if it be not so, then our conversion, our turning, our being instructed, has been apparent, not real. For—

III. THERE MAY BE REPENTANCE WITHOUT CONVERSION. We find many instances in Scripture of transgressors saying, "I have sinned," and their words were true, and felt to be true by themselves. They were the utterance of grief and real distress; but because such repentance never roused the energies of the will to resolve on the abandonment of the sin, therefore, though there was repentance, it led to no conversion. And even a true repentance in its initial stages, and until it has led the soul really to God, exists without conversion. It is a most solemn fact that there can be real distress about sin, and yet no forsaking of it. And if sin be not forsaken, then this distress, which is God's distinct call to turn unto him and live, grows fainter and fainter with every repetition of the sin.

IV. AND THERE MAY BE THE FRUITS OF CONVERSION WITHOUT REPENTANCE. There may be the hatred of sin, the love of goodness and of God, without the previous process of conversion. The gift of regeneration is essential to every soul, but some regenerate ones are kept by the grace of God from ever needing that deep repentance which is essential to conversion. It is possible to grow up in the kingdom of God, never to go away from the Father's house. That does not mean to be faultless, but to live, as the settled tenor of one's life, in love, obedience, and trust. These are the most blessed ones, who are "kept from the evil that it should not hurt them," to whom the Father will say, "Son, *thou* art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." But—

V. GENERALLY THERE HAS BEEN BOTH IN GOD'S SAVED ONES. Therefore it is safer for the most of us to conclude that we need both, and to seek both from him who is "exalted to give repentance and remission of sins." And let us not be content with repentance alone, unless it lead on to conversion, nor let us deem our conversion genuine unless it cause, as here in this verse, our repentance to deepen more and more.—C.

Vers. 31—34.—*The new covenant.* The consideration of this new covenant will enable us to understand how it is that, whilst many Christian men are at peace and content in regard to their justification before God and their acceptance with him, they are very far from content in regard to their attainment in Christian character and their practical sanctification. The reason is that, whilst they are content simply to look in faith to Christ for the former, they forget that this is precisely the condition of the latter also. Hence they are for ever struggling and making good resolves, labouring earnestly to conquer this sin and that and to win one and another as yet unwon grace. But the new covenant is a promise, is the assurance indeed, that God has taken the matter of our salvation into his own hands. It is all of grace; he gives everything; nothing is left to our own solitary effort. If we read over the words of the covenant

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as they are given here from first to last, there is not a single word about anything to be done by us. The whole covenant is not so much between man and his Maker as between Jehovah and man's Representative, the Lord Jesus Christ. The human side of the covenant has been already fulfilled by Jesus, and there remains nothing now but the covenant of giving, not the covenant of requirements. The whole covenant with regard to us, the people of God, now stands thus: "I will give this; I will bestow that; I will fulfil this promise; I will grant that favour." The old covenant said, "Do this, and thou shalt live." The new says, "I will do all." In considering this new covenant, note—

I. ITS RESEMBLANCES TO THE OLD. 1. *Both are based on the goodness of another.* The Jew in the old covenant knew that it was for Abraham's sake he had been chosen and called and privileged above all other nations. And that our privileges are all "for Christ's sake" is among the alphabet of the truths of the faith we hold. 2. *Both demand fitness and preparation for the enjoyment of the blessings they promise.* For the Jew, obedience to the Law of God was the condition of his entering into and living happily in the land God had promised to his fathers. Because they failed in this obedience, the carcases of a whole generation of them fell in the wilderness. And for the Christian, faith is the imperative condition. "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." 3. *Both gave help and direction for the fulfilment of these conditions.* To Israel was given an external Law; to the Christian, an indwelling Spirit. Hence most fitly was the gift of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost; for that day commemorated the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. It was fitting, therefore, that the giving of the new law of the new life should be on the day that told of the giving of the law for the old life.

II. ITS CONTRASTS. 1. The old covenant related to *the possession of an earthly inheritance, the new to the attainment of a spiritual character.* The one was of earth, the other of heaven. The one held before Israel the winning and keeping of the promised land; the other, the possession of likeness to God. 2. The old covenant was chiefly characterized by *external law;* the new, by *the gift of the Spirit.* 3. The old *asked before it gave;* the new *gave before it asked.* True, there was the promise made to Abraham, but Israel could not enter into it unless they kept the commandments of God. But in the new covenant God does not ask for holiness till he has given the Holy Spirit, until he has put his Law in our inward parts, and written it upon our hearts. As when he bade the palsied rise and walk, he did not ask before he gave; for along with the command went the power to obey. And this power resides in the influence of the love of Christ upon the believing soul. It is at the cross of Christ that the writing of the Law upon the heart most of all takes place. Regeneration is in connection, inseparable connection, with the cross. Do any ask—

III. THE REASON OF THE OLD COVENANT, NOTWITHSTANDING IT SO PERPETUALLY FAILED? It was necessary to show the hopelessness of all covenants of works. Twice had the experiment been tried; with our first parents, Adam and Eve, in the garden of Eden; then under the most advantageous circumstances such covenant was tried and failed again with Israel.

IV. THE SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW. It is manifold and manifest—in its nobler aim, in its universality, in its nobler result in character, in its surer foundation, in its light and easy yoke, etc.

CONCLUSION. Do any say, "I have not yet experienced the blessings of this new covenant"? Remember the Law is not written *all at once,* and that we must seek the Lord's help. It is his work.—C.

Vers. 31—33.—*Great encouragements for those returning to God.* It is sad enough that there should be any going away from God so as to require a return. It is better never to have gone away from him than to return after such departure. Better be the son to whom the Father says, "Thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine," than the one who came back in misery and shame, notwithstanding all the compassionate love wherewith he was welcomed. Let all young children, and they who have the training of them, remember this; and all young converts to Christ. The same grace that forgives the going away, when in penitence the wanderer comes back, is ready to prevent any such going away at all. And this preventive grace is what we

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should all desire and seek. But the sad fact is that vast numbers have wandered from God. How few can leave themselves out of the prophet's confession, "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned aside every one to his own way"! In this emergency the question arises as to what is to be done. If God were at once to inflict vengeance on the transgressor, or, which would amount to the same thing, if the wanderer were allowed to go on in his own way, none could complain or say that God did aught that was unjust. But instead of that, he mercifully causes that the way of the transgressor should be hard; he makes it grievous unto him, to the end that he may weary of it and long for the good ways he has left. And by-and-by he will and does, and it is here at this point the blessed promise of these verses meets him for his great encouragement. He has found out how bitter and evil a thing it is to sin against the Lord, how full of folly and madness his conduct has been, and in deep humility and contrition he is returning "with his whole heart." But such as thus return are full of self-distrust and deep fear lest they should wander off again and fall once more. They have been beguiled before and led to doubt God's Word. Now, these verses promise that the three great avenues by means of which unbelief, the fountain sin of all sin, enters the man, shall each one be securely guarded against such entrance for the future. The verse contains three distinct promises. Note how such safeguard is secured by—

I. THE FIRST PROMISE. "I will put my Law in their inward parts," etc. (ver. 33). Now, the avenue that this guarded was that of *the understanding*. The people to whom the prophet wrote had been sorely tempted to question whether, after all, God *was* the Lord—that is, was the supreme Ruler and Disposer of all events; for had they not seen how other nations who acknowledged him not had risen up and prospered, whilst his own faithful people had often been in sore straits? (Cf. homily on *Idolatry*, ch. x. 1—17, vol. i. p. 275.) There was very much to be said in favour of the gods of other nations, and very much was said. And when all this was encouraged and secretly seconded by the lurking likings of their lower nature, what wonder if their understandings in regard to this great question were sometimes bewildered? We can see how unbelief would find occasion to enter in in force through such bewildered and doubting minds. And perhaps never can the question be settled by the intellect alone. God does not reveal himself in all his infinitude to that part of our nature. It is *the heart* which must know "that he is the Lord." But this promise is for this very thing. Such a heart shall be given. The rational conclusions of the understanding shall be supported by the mighty force of the heart's intuitions, and the two combined will for ever render utterly impossible all doubt whether God be the Lord. The peace of God keeps the heart and mind in Christ Jesus (Phil. iv.). If we have not heart-knowledge of God, that of the intellect alone will be likely to fall away and leave us with no knowledge of God at all. How blessed, then, cannot but be this promise to all those who, because they have lacked such knowledge hitherto, have sinned and brought on themselves such distress, but who now are returning to God with their whole heart! It is a mighty encouragement indeed.

II. THE SECOND PROMISE. "And they shall be my people." The avenue that this guards is that of *man's circumstances*. Doubt does often enter by such way. If a man be surrounded with distress, almost worn out with "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," broken-hearted and bankrupt of all earthly good, let none condemn such, or only those who are themselves without sin though they have been in like manner tried, if doubt do haunt these troubled ones and faith in God dies down. Do we not admire Job just because he held so fast to his faith under such awful circumstances? Is not our very admiration of him proof of our conviction as to the sore difficulty of faith keeping its hold at such times? Did not even he than whom Christ said none of women born was greater—John the Baptist—find the drear dungeon into which Herod had flung him, and the cruel death which he knew awaited him, more than his spirit could bear? And so he sent to the Lord, saying, "*Art* thou he that should come, or," etc.? Oh, it is easy under sunny skies and amid happy surroundings and when all is well, to sing sweet hymns about trusting in God and the blessedness of faith. But let all that prosperity vanish, and be replaced by grim, gaunt poverty, in which and because of which you have to see your beloved wife or children, or both, hunger and perhaps die, because you have not enough to ward off from them the sufferings

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they have to endure. Ah! where would be the faith of myriads of those well-to-do Christians who love to sing "Sweet it is to trust in him"? Not a little of the sad unbelief of the poor is accounted for, and we cannot but think rendered far less guiltful, by the fact of the terrible privations that are so often their lot. (Cf. homily on *The moral disadvantages of the poor*, ch. v. 4, vol. i. p. 133.) But this promise, "They shall be my people," assures that such trial of faith shall not be permitted. For the promise means that God will bestow on them such signal favour; he will so graciously deal with them that it shall become evident to all that they are his people, the beloved of the Lord. They shall have that "blessing which maketh rich and addeth no sorrow thereto." They shall not any more have to eat the bread of affliction or drink the water of affliction, but their circumstances shall be so happy and peaceful as to utterly prevent that unbelief to which adversity so often gives rise. The beggar Lazarus is carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom; not one word is said about his character; and this surely seems to teach that the poor, to whom belief in the love of God has been so difficult here, shall hereafter in happier circumstances see and enjoy that love of which here they are only told. Of course, happy circumstances, such as are involved in this promise, would be of little avail without the bestowment of the other promise, "a heart to know that I am the Lord;" but with that this gives a double defence, within which blessed are they who abide. And if it be said that God does not now, as he did in Old Testament days, make any promise to his servants that they shall be exempt from adversity, as in fact they are not, it is to be remembered that they have far clearer light than had the saints of the Old Testament concerning that blessed home of God's people, of whose inhabitants it is said, "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light upon them, nor," etc. If not now, assuredly then, shall they be known as God's people by the happy external lot which will be theirs.

III. THE THIRD PROMISE. "I will be their God." The avenue which this guards is that of *the heart*. Man's understanding may be convinced, and his circumstances be all favourable and prosperous, but if he have not rest of his soul in God, unbelief will still assail and, not unlikely, overcome him. "Nostrum cor inquietum est donec requiescat in te." He must be able to say of the Lord, "He is *my* God" (Ps. xc. 2), ere ever he has rest in God. God must be his joy; he must "delight himself also in the Lord," and be happy in God, would he effectually bar out all unbelief. But this third promise ensures this. "I will be their God." It tells of this joy which they shall have in him, and of their happy rest in him.

CONCLUSION. Then let us "*return unto God with our whole heart.*" Perhaps it is because we have not returned in this whole-hearted way that we yet have to wait for these promises to be fulfilled; and that we still find unbelief, though banished for a while, yet returning and haunting us once more. It is said of Joshua and Caleb that they served the Lord "fully." It is this thoroughness which is needed. Let but this be, and the understanding will be satisfied; the circumstances of our life will be pleasing to us, because they are those the Lord pleases; and our heart shall sing for gladness, because God is our "exceeding joy."—C.

Ver. 32.—*God the Husband of his people.* (Cf. homily on ch. iii. 14.)—C.

Ver. 3.—*The everlasting love of God.* I. IN CONTRAST TO OTHER LOVERS. Note ch. xxx. 14, "All thy lovers have forgotten thee," etc. Israel had had many lovers professing regard and offering service; but what had their regard and service come to? They were now cold, careless, perhaps even hostile. They had shown the appearance of love to Israel, not that they cared for Israel, but because they themselves were advantaged. Now, that is no true affection which changes when the thing loved ceases to gratify us. Yet this was all the affection of these other lovers amounted to—a mere name of love; a feeling which, in the course of time, was to evince their own instability and bring shame to them. But God is a contrast to all this. He loves with an everlasting love. He loves Israel, not only in the days of prosperity and wealth and beauty, but in the days of downfall and despair. His thought penetrates through to the abiding worth of humanity. We do not slander human affection, or in any way under-estimate it, when we say that man cannot love his fellow-man as God loves him. God it is who first of all shows man what love really is; then man, having the Spirit

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of the Divine Father breathed into him, learns to love also. We cannot attain to anything which will give us the right to say with respect to duration that ours is an everlasting love; but, as true Christians, we may have something of the quality of that affection.

II. IN SPITE OF UNRECIPROCATED AFFECTION. Israel had had other lovers, and she had loved them in return. They had bestowed gifts on her, and she had bestowed gifts on them, and so there was profession of mutual regard as long as it was profitable to make it. But there was no love to God. His holiness, his goodness, was not seen. Year by year his open hand was stretched forth, filled with the corn and the wine and the oil; and the people greedily laid hold of the gifts, and thought nothing of the Giver. Not but what there were individuals whose hearts went out gratefully and devotedly to God, as the Psalms show. But then these individuals would not find very many to respond to the invitation, "Oh, love the Lord, all ye his saints." And still the love of God goes on. Men need the manifestations of God's love all the more, just because of their unreciprocating attitude towards him. Love cannot prevent the headstrong prodigal from seeking his own desires, but it can keep things ready for the season of repentance and return. The manifestations of the Divine love are to constitute a great spectacle, breaking down the heart of the selfish man.

III. THE LOVE IS DECLARED WHEN MOST THE DECLARATION IS NEEDED. Love does not always look like love. The spurious puts on the appearance of the genuine, and the genuine gets hidden behind the necessary manifestations of righteousness and fidelity to law. They that break law must be punished and suffer. They that have false, unstable, misleading lovers cannot escape the consequence of their foolish connection with them in the day when the lovers are destroyed and go into captivity (ch. xxii. 20, 22). Israel itself must suffer loss and go into exile and sit with dust and ashes on its head. But in that very day comes the assurance of everlasting love. The lower skies are filled with cloud and storm and rain, but the abiding sun is still above, and its radiance will remain when the storm has passed away.—Y.

Ver. 5.—*Work yet to be found in the vineyard.* Here is to be an evidence of the everlasting love spoken of in ver. 3.

I. THE RESTORATION OF WHAT HAD BEEN LOST. This is not the first prophecy in the book concerning vineyards. It had been declared that the nation from afar should eat up the vines and the fig trees of Israel (ch. v. 17). "I will surely consume, saith the Lord. There shall be no grapes on the vine" (ch. viii. 13). The bright prophecy here could not have been made but for the dark prophecies going before. The literal fulfilment of the prophecy is, of course, the least part of it. The deepest meaning is that, whatever we may lose through God's chastisements, we shall get much more in a spiritual and truly abiding way.

II. THE FUTURE IS DESCRIBED IN TERMS OF THE PAST. One of the occupations of the past had been to plant vineyards in Samaria. What associations there must have been with the sunny slopes! It is the way of God to speak of future comforts and glories in terms drawn from the present and from things around us. The future will give opportunities for profitable work. We shall always have some place to work in which shall be as the mountains of Samaria, and some work to do which shall be as the planting of vines. Fruitless toil and crushed hopes are but a disciplining episode in the career of those who are the heirs of eternal life.

III. THE STABILITY IMPLIED IN THIS PROMISE. Five years, according to the Mosaic Law, had to pass from the planting to the time of fruitage. The prophecy was therefore a prophecy of peaceful settlement. The whole outlook gave a sense of security. Looked at in this light, one sees the reason of previous overthrowing and destruction. The aim is to get down to something solid and stable, to purify the heart from unworthy aims and love of the fleeting. The things that are shaken are removed, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

IV. THE INCLUSIVENESS OF THIS PROMISE. Vineyards are to be planted, but vineyards are not the first necessity of life. To promise the planting of vineyards implied the promise of other things. The corn and the oil went along with the wine. The vineyard is doubtless here mentioned as a symbol of joy. He who is able to plant a vineyard is able to plant all good things. Note the evidence we have of the temporal

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fulfilment of this promise. From vineyards our Lord drew some of his most suggestive teaching. We may be sure they had often been seen by him, and their spiritual significance apprehended. Vine-planting was a suitable industry, an industry to be expected in the land out of which the spies had brought the ponderous cluster of grapes.—Y.

Vers. 8, 9.—*God the Gatherer of his people.* I. WHENCE HE GATHERS THEM. The place is spoken of very indefinitely, not from any doubt as to its reality, but because it was largely a *terra incognita.* It was the land away in the northward direction, but what its extent or what its power for mischief there were but few who could guess. One thing, however, was possible to consider in the days of exile, when the north country had become a sad actual experience, namely, how Jeremiah had been sent to speak joyful tidings as well as mournful ones with respect to the power of this north country. True, he had spoken again and again concerning the evil and the great destruction coming out of the north; but here is a word from the same man and under the same authority to say that the power of the north country is not to continue. God uses even great nations for his own purposes. There is indication that these powers of the north were astonished at their own success. "The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem" (Lam. iv. 12). They were only the agents of God, and God could take his people out of their midst again when once the Exile had done its work. Distance is no difficulty. God can hinder or facilitate in a journey just as seems him best. Once he kept his people forty years in a journey from one land to another that, if he had chosen, might have been accomplished in a very short time.

II. THOSE WHOM HE GATHERS. The Lord's compassions fail not. To the young, the strong, the healthy, those perfect in body, nothing was needed but to say, "The time is come for return. Make your start." But then all were not so placed. The weaklings have ever to be considered, and God considers them, as it were, first of all. There are the blind—God will keep them in the way; there are the lame—God will provide that they be conveyed and sufficiently helped; there are women, with all their peculiar anxieties, who need to be dealt with very tenderly, and all grounds for alarm taken out of their way as far as possible. Well, God specifies these cases as representative of the provision he makes for every sort of weakness. It is the mark of God's way for men that it is a way for the weak, a way in which provision is made for every sort of infirmity. There are ways in the world which are only for the strong; the weak soon get pushed aside. And God can bring all these weak people along, because the right spirit is in them. They come in weeping and in prayer. You can be eyes to a blind man, if he admits his blindness and is willing to be guided; but if he insists upon it that he can see, what are you to do with him? This is the only means by which God's true people can be gathered into one way, moving with one purpose towards one place, namely, that they be each one of them from the very heart submitted to the Divine will and control.

III. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH GOD GATHERS. The spirit of a father. Israel must needs go into exile and chastisement for a while; but the place left vacant is the child's place, and none but the child can fill it. It is the evidence of a father's tenderness that he cares for the blind and the lame and the weak. The house of Israel had said to a stock, "Thou art my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth." And their delusion had borne fruit in banishment and captivity. But the true Father remembered them all the time; and with the power of the true God and in the spirit of the true Father, he gathered them and guided them home.—Y.

Ver. 10.—*The Scatterer also the Gatherer.* I. GOD AS THE SCATTERER. Seeing that the Scatterer becomes the Gatherer, it is evident that scattering is used to describe his action by a sort of accommodation. Outwardly it looks like scattering; but there is a spirit and a purpose and a regulative principle in the action which makes it to be really only a stage in a more complete gathering worthy of the name. It is, perhaps, worthy of note that there is in the Hebrew word something of the idea of scattering even as seed is scattered. Now, when seed is scattered, it is with a perfect knowledge of the large gathering which will result. Seed is not flung at random, and then left for ever.

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Beforehand there is preparation and afterwards there is expectation. And so we see that when God uses the same name for an action that we do, it by no means follows that he is doing just the same thing as we should indicate by the name. Note also that in this very prophecy here there is a reference to a very old intimation of the distresses that might come on Israel in the event of disobedience, "I will scatter you among the heathen" (Lev. xxvi. 33).

II. GOD AS THE GATHERER. What a difference here between man and God! Oftentimes it is easy for man to scatter; but how shall he gather again? One fool can undo in a few hours what wise and diligent men have taken years in building up. But since God scatters upon principle, he knows where every fragment is, and continues to superintend and guide it as part of the whole. We see only disjointed parts, and so there is something very nondescript and puzzling and ineffectual-looking about their operations. God, however, sees the whole. Hence the insistence in apostolic teaching upon unity. Christians could not be kept in one place. Persecution drove them apart; the needs of the gospel sent each apostle into his own field; and Christians sprang up in many far-separated places. But though scattered and separated in appearance, they were still one, because the one Spirit was in them. The gathering principle is, in Christians, a principle that rises dominant over all earthly distinctions. Men cannot be kept permanently together unless the Christian spirit is in them; and if the Christian spirit is in them, there is no power that can keep them permanently separated.

III. GOD AS HE WHO KEEPS HIS PEOPLE FROM A SECOND SCATTERING. We cannot put too much force into this thought of God keeping his people as a shepherd does his flock. What a significance it adds to the way in which Jesus speaks of himself as the good Shepherd! Who shall scatter when it is God's will to gather and to unite in an abiding company? Who shall scatter when he who gathers has in him not only the spirit of a shepherd, but also the power to keep his sheep from all danger? And what a warning to us against all needless separations! Men are betrayed into danger to themselves by pushing individual liberty to extremes. The shepherd will keep every member of the flock so long as it holds to the flock. God will only keep us so long as we are in his way, within his boundaries, subject to his directions.—Y.

Vers. 12—14.—*Praise waiting for God in Zion.* I. THE PLACE OF PRAISE. To speak of Zion was to speak of the dwelling-place of Jehovah. To sing in the height of Zion, therefore, was to sing, as it were, at the door of God's own house. While God ever visited idolatry with the severest punishments, he yet localized his presence by the sanctities connected with the ark. It was the holy of holies that made Zion a sacred place, and if the people were helped in praise and worship by assembling there, then there is every reason for mentioning Zion as the great place of national rejoicing. But we must take care not to consider any literal fulfilment of this prophecy as sufficient. The word is one taking our thoughts to that Mount Zion, which is part of the city of the living God, of the heavenly Jerusalem. The days of earthly localization are for ever past. The principle of assembly now is that, wherever two or three are gathered together in the Name of Christ, there he is in their midst.

II. THE CAUSE OF PRAISE. Praise and gladness always have some cause, but the question remains to be asked whether it be a cause which God will approve. If it be gladness rising out of some selfish triumph or gain, then the joy will assuredly be turned into mourning. But here the goodness of Jehovah is emphatically described as being the cause of the joy and singing. There is something substantial to sing about—corn, and wine, and oil, and cattle: the appropriate produce of the land, something that is at once the reward of righteous striving and the gift of an approving God. Everything is right externally and internally. The very life of the people is like a watered garden, which surely is a very suggestive expression to indicate that all is as it ought to be. A watered garden suggests a piece of land worth cultivating, well cultivated, and supplied with every factor contributing to fruitfulness. But what has been said of the *place* of praise must also be said of the *cause* of praise. Corn and wine and all the rest of the good things are only symbols of deeper blessings that have to do with the satisfaction of the heart. "Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." It is an easy thing for him, if needs be, to make up the defects of nature, which he showed at the feeding of the five

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thousand. Yet, in spite of this, famines are not always interfered with. God is not solicitous to go beyond what he has provided in nature for the support of natural life. But he is solicitous that we should apprehend the great spiritual abundance within our reach. The deepest meaning of this prophecy is that spiritual men only can really praise God, because they are praising him out of hearts that are being sustained by the richness of spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

III. THE CERTAINTY OF PRAISE. The satisfied heart must praise, else there is a proof that the heart is not really satisfied. Satisfaction can no more be concealed than dissatisfaction. When in the writings of the apostles we come across outbursts of doxology, it is just what we might expect as being in harmony with the greatness of the blessings received. And this is just what often makes the praise part of worship eminently unsatisfactory, that men are thanking God for what they have not received. All compositions having praise and thanksgiving for their elements, and being successful compositions, must, by the very nature of the case, owe their origin to some actual experience of God's goodness. Hence it is important in this passage to notice how three things are bound together in the one prediction. 1. There is the gift of God. 2. The consequent satisfaction. 3. The irrepressible joy. And what greater gift can we have from God than a heart filled with pure, abiding joy, free from reproach, free from apprehension?

IV. THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE PRAISE. Young and old, priests and people, are joined together in the common song. God's spiritual blessings are for all. There is much significance in that promise, "I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness." That means that the people are right religiously, and that again means that the priests are attentive to their own proper duty. Liberality to all Christian institutions, to all that is truly evangelistic and charitable, to all that is in the way of the highest ministry to mankind, is a sign of spiritual prosperity.—Y.

Vers. 15—17.—*Sorrowing mothers and their consolation.* I. THE GRIEFS OF BEREAVED MOTHERS. There is an innumerable company of women who have seen the children die to whom they themselves had given birth, and Rachel is their great representative. She stands before us here as the mother of a nation; for surely it only spoils a grand poetical idea to attach her to some tribes rather than others. She sees the nation which sprang from her husband Jacob going from the land of promise into captivity, and straightway she reckons it as a dead nation. Bear in mind distinctly that the mourning is not over dead individuals, but over a dead nation. The individuals went on living, but the nation in its pride and privilege was gone. So one might think of some representative spirit bewailing dead Greece and dead Rome. The figure, moreover, derives its strength from what must have been very frequent in the land of Israel, as in every land before or since, namely, the sad sight presented by a mother weeping over her dead child. The mother's sorrow is unique; its elements can only be imperfectly apprehended by others. The object of so much hope, solicitude, and pleasure is gone. The proper order of things is reversed. The mother should see the child grow to manhood or womanhood, and then go first into the unseen world. Death, coming in this way, seems to furnish a plausible ground of complaint, and if anything can be said to lessen the mystery and the sorrow and make hope rise in the heart, it should be said.

II. CONSOLATION IN SUCH TIME OF GRIEF. The real Rachel needed no such consolation. But bereaved mothers both need it and can have it. They have worked for something else than death and the breaking off of their purposes, and their work shall not be in vain. Death is a great deceiver in making his power seem greater than it is. When children are taken from this world into the next, opportunities are not lost, they are only changed. God will assuredly not allow the highest joys belonging to human nature to suffer from a cause so purely external as the duration of temporal existence. When Herod slew the children at Bethlehem, this prophecy had a sort of fulfilment, and surely so far as it was fulfilled it was fulfilled altogether. To every one of those weeping mothers it might have been said, "Refrain thy voice from weeping and thine eyes from tears." The weeping and the tears are natural enough, but after all they have no sufficient ground in reason. As a general rule, life must be taken with all its risks and casualties, seeing that risk and casualty, as we call them, are after all, according

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to a law. Sometimes there are extraordinary preservations of infant life, and when some life so delivered has afterwards unfolded into eminence and usefulness, there is a talk of something specially providential in the preservation. Some such preserved lives, however, turn out a great curse, and then where is the providence? The great thing every mother should seek is such faithfulness, such wisdom, such right dealing in all ways as will enable her to be a true mother to her children, however long they live. Then, whatever happens, there is the certainty that her work will be rewarded. The work of individual obedience can never come to anything but reward in the end. The mischief is that very often we want the reward to come in our way and not in God's.—Y.

Ver. 26.—*Sweet sleep.* Assuming that Jeremiah is here the speaker, what a suggestion there is of restless, unrefreshing nights on other occasions! And little wonder. It may have been the case that many of his prophecies came to him at night, and if so, considering the elements of those prophecies, his nights must often have been very troubled ones. But if we look attentively at the contents of ch. xxx. and xxxi., we find very sufficient causes for the sweetness of the prophet's sleep. Jehovah makes one long announcement of favour, restoration, and comfort. Hitherto when the prophet has had to listen to Jehovah, if there have been consolatory utterances, they have been mingled with denunciation and words of the most melancholy import. But now there is one unbroken stream of good tidings, and the effect is shown even in sleep. And if in sleep, how much more in waking hours! The whole round of the day becomes different when God looks favourably on the life. Sweetness of sleeping hours must come from all being right in waking hours. Now, with Jeremiah, as to his own personal life, all was right in waking hours, but with his nation all was wrong; and so through the day he went about seeing sin and foreseeing suffering, and at night his vivid imagination must often have kept him awake or peopled what broken sleep he got with the most terrible dreams. Bad men may sleep better than good ones, so long as there is nothing to awaken their selfish fears and good men spend restless nights over the troubles of those in whom they are interested. Yet the restlessness must come from the failing to see the abiding goodness of God. Here, for a little, God drove every cloud from the sky of his servant, and showed him how heavenly brightness was a thing entirely above earthly confusions; and then his servant could get sweet sleep. And God will give to all that wait upon him that quiet calm of the heart which is to our higher life what sweet sleep is to the body. It is God's will that our present life, with all its varied needs, should have all the refreshment he can give.—Y.

Vers. 29, 30.—*Jehovah visiting the individual for his sins.* I. THE SIN OF SOME AND THE SUFFERING OF OTHERS. This is put before us in a very striking figure. Literally, the taste of a sour grape would be an instantaneous sensation; but here we are asked to imagine the possibility of a man getting whatever other advantage there might be in the grape, whatever nourishment, whatever refreshment, and then handing on the one bad element of sourness. And truly it often seems as if there were this kind of division. The wrong-doer goes on succeeding, enjoying himself, getting his full of life, and then his children come in to find that the father's wrong-doing is like a millstone round their necks, destroying every chance they might otherwise have. The figure here presents from the human side that fact of experience which from the Divine side is presented as a law. "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children" (Exod. xx. 5).

II. THE SIN OF SOME AND THEIR OWN SUFFERING. We need to look somewhat carefully at the point brought out in ver. 30. At first it seems as if daily experience were contradicted, for we leap to an inference that the children's teeth will not be set on edge by the sour grapes their fathers have eaten; whereas it is abundantly plain that children still suffer for the sins of their fathers. But observe that this is not at all denied. The great point insisted on is that the fathers will suffer themselves; and this is a point that needs to be insisted on, for the fallacy is continually arising that a man may, by some magic, some precaution, escape the consequences of his evil, and so he may escape from some consequences. But observe, again, the all-comprehending word

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here used, "he shall *die*," and this word has a retrospective force. There never has been any other law but that a man shall die for his own iniquity. Possibly we should take this passage as having some sort of reference to the old custom of making revenge an hereditary thing. If the doer of a wrong escaped vengeance and died peacefully in his bed, then his son stood in the father's place, and became an object of attack till the punishment due to the father was visited on him. It seems so plain to us that a man should die for his own iniquity, punishment falling on the head of him who does the wrong, that we find it hard to imagine a day when the ethical code was otherwise. Whereas it is tolerably clear that in Old Testament times and countries the feeling was that *somebody must be punished*; and if the real criminal escaped, why, then take his nearest blood relation. That the Christian looks on things so differently is the clearest proof that this prophecy has been fulfilled.

III. THE NEED THERE IS THAT EVERY ONE SHOULD CLASSIFY THE SUFFERINGS OF HIS LIFE. It is not enough that we seek deliverance from suffering. It is right for us to do so, and suffering, we may be sure, is not by the will of God. But as there is suffering which comes from causes within our control, so there is suffering coming from causes outside our control; and it is with the former only that we can deal. Besides, it is the worst suffering, seeing that it comes from trouble and unrest of conscience. God has so made us that the worst wounds from others are but as surface scratches compared with the wounds that in our folly we inflict on ourselves. Then we have to look, not only on the sufferings, but enjoyments. We may so live as to rise above the worst that men can do to us, and at the same time, we may be the better for whatever good man is disposed to do. If sometimes it is true that the fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth get set on edge, is it not also true that the fathers eat sweet grapes, yet little of the sweetness they seem to taste—it is a sweetness standing over for the children?—Y.

Vers. 31—34.—*The new covenant and the old.* I. THE LIGHT CAST ON THE OLD COVENANT. It would be a mistake to describe it as a covenant that failed. Paradoxical as the expression sounds, the very breaking of the covenant furnished the proof of its success. It made man's position clearer to him; it prepared the world for Christ. The old covenant had been broken in spite of all the teaching connected with it. "Know Jehovah" had been dinned into the ear, and doubtless many had a notion that they did know Jehovah, whereas all that they knew was a certain round of ritual observances. At all events, it was a knowledge that left iniquity unforgiven and sin still registered in the book of God's remembrance. It was such a knowledge as the wrong-doer has of his judge. It was the knowledge of a force that thwarted all selfishness, and came with overwhelming completeness to ruin the plans of man. It was not the knowledge coming from trust and leading to greater trust—knowledge of God as a Guide, Director, and Provider. Yet some indeed knew. The man who said to his neighbour and his brother, "Know Jehovah," must have been, in some instances at least, one who himself had some real knowledge. As there were men of the reforming spirit before the Reformation, so there were Christians in essence before Christianity. The breaking of the old covenant shows the thing that was needed, namely, a new power in the hearts of men. The knowledge of God is not to be gained by mere teaching. Teaching has its place, and within its own limits is indispensable; but who could teach a child to eat, to see, to hear? If faculties are not inborn, we cannot do anything with them.

II. THE CONFIDENT PREDICTIONS ON THE NEW COVENANT. The old covenant starts with law; the new one springs out of life. Ver. 33 gives one of the Old Testament ways of expressing the doctrine of regeneration. God writes the laws of spiritual life on the heart, just as he writes the laws of natural life on every natural germ; and then all the rest is a matter of unfolding, of growth, of encouragement, of culture. The old covenant was one long, exhaustive, thorough experiment by which the fact became clear that in the *natural man* there was nothing to unfold. The new covenant established within a very brief period that, given a new life-principle working within him, man is indeed a being of glorious capabilities. The first man of the new covenant, in point of quality, is of course the Man Christ Jesus himself. God's Law was written in the heart of his Son. Here is one way in which the Law and the prophets are completed. The ark with its inscriptions vanishes; we hear nothing of it later than ch. iii.

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16. And in its place there comes the loving heart trusted to the utmost liberty. Well might there be confidence in speaking of the new covenant. When good seed and good soil and favourable circumstances meet, then there is certainty of perfect and abundant fruit. The new covenant is above all things a covenant with the individual. It is made to depend upon individual susceptibility and individual fidelity. Also it is a knowledge that comes in repentance, forgiveness, and favour. And all this teaches us that a special meaning must be put into the term, "people of God." The true people of God are constituted by the aggregation of individual believers. They do not begin their journey to the heavenly land of promise marching as one constrained company through a miraculous Red Sea passage; they rather go, one by one, through a straitened entrance, even through a needle's eye, some of them.—Y.

Vers. 35—37.—*The seed of Israel; signs of its everlasting duration.* I. THEY ARE SIGNS WITH MUCH REVELATION OF GOD IN THEM. The sun, the moon, the stars, the heavenly spaces with all their occupants, the terrestrial surface with the fathomless depths beneath it. We shall never know all that is to be known about these existences; but we may soon know enough to know through them something of their Maker. That they are the common work of one hand, the common expression of one wisdom and love, soon becomes plain. The unity of all we see is a truth becoming clearer in the light of scientific investigation. God drove Israel from the land they had polluted and forfeited by their idolatries; but their share in the common possessions of mankind remained. It is plain that man gets good from all these signs here mentioned, and the largeness of the good depends on the righteousness and understanding shown in the use.

II. THEY ARE SIGNS WITHIN THE COMPREHENSION OF ALL. Even a child can be made to understand the unfailing regularity that belongs to them. They are signs all over the world. It is not a sign drawn from Jerusalem or from anything comparatively stable in the Israelites' *peculiar* experience. Sun and moon and stars know nothing of national distinctions. Each nation doubtless can claim its territory to the very centre of the globe, but beyond a certain depth, that globe is defiant of them all. One man may know more than another of the constitution of these signs, by reason of peculiar opportunities, but all can know enough for the purpose here required.

III. THEY ARE SIGNS DRAWN FROM GOD'S INDEPENDENT OPERATION. Not from operations which as a general rule depend on our co-operation. God's operations in sun, moon, and stars are independent of us—unaffected by our disobedience, our negligence, unsteadiness; uplifted far above our interference. Indeed, what can show more clearly how God's operations on the earth's surface are interfered with by human ignorance and indolence than the contrast with heaven's regularity?

IV. THE THING SIGNIFIED WILL OUTLAST THE SIGNS. The thing signified is the everlasting duration of the seed of Israel. That seed will remain when the signs themselves, having done their work, are vanished. The things that are seen are temporal. As our body is but the earthly house of this tabernacle, so the visible universe itself is but as the tabernacle wherein God dwells with us. But all these visible things will come to their end when they have done their work, not through failure of Divine power. They will disappear into a more glorious transformation, and serve some purpose to God's true Israel, the very outlines of which we cannot yet comprehend.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Jeremiah was far from wishing to depress his fellow-countrymen to the point of disbelieving in the inalienable promises of God to Israel. He fully recognized an element of truth in the preaching of the "false prophets," viz. that Jehovah was still the God of his people Israel, though for wise purposes he chose to hide his face for a time. His own faith was intense, to the pitch of an even Roman heroism (see Livy, xxvi. 11). The opportunity (or rather—see below—the right) of purchasing a piece of ground at Anathoth was the occasion which called forth the most striking proof of his

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sublime confidence in God. Not that he understood how it could be God's will that he, in the besieged city, should constitute himself a landed proprietor. He had his difficulties; but instead of brooding over them, he laid them before Jehovah in prayer. And the Divine revelation came that, though long-continued transgressions had brought upon Judah the sorest punishment, they should yet be restored to their land; and, though the first covenant had been broken, a second and an everlasting covenant should in future times be granted to God's people; and the sign that the first part of this promise should in very deed be realized is the purchase of the field by Jeremiah.

Vers. 1—5.—Time and circumstances of the following revelation. It took place in the tenth year of Zedekiah, the eighteenth of Nebuchadnezzar (comp. ch. xxv. 1; lii. 12). The siege of Jerusalem had begun in the preceding year (ch. xxxix. 1), but had been temporarily raised on the approach of an Egyptian army (ch. xxxvii. 5, 11). Jeremiah, who had declared resistance hopeless, had been accused of treason, and imprisoned (ch. xxxvii. 13), and in prison he remained till the close of the siege. Like St. Paul at Rome, however, he was allowed free communication with visitors, as appears from ver. 8 and ch. xxxviii. 1. Vers. 2—5 are parenthetical (see on ver. 6).

Ver. 2.—**In the court of the prison**; or, *the court of the guard*, which adjoined the royal palace (Neh. iii. 25).

Ver. 3.—**Had shut him up.** A brief and general account of the circumstances related more in full in ch. xxxvii. For the prophecies referred to, see ch. xxxiv. 3—5; xxxvii. 17; xxxviii. 17—23 (the following verse is almost identical with ch. xxxiv. 3).

Ver. 5.—**Until I visit him**; *i.e.* until I take notice of him. "To visit" is used in a good (ch. xxvii. 22; xxix. 10) as well as in a bad sense (ch. vi. 15; xlix. 8), so that no definite announcement is made respecting Zedekiah's future. There was no object to gain by extending the scope of the revelation beyond the immediate present, and Zedekiah's offences did not require such an anticipative punishment as the clear prediction of the details of his fate (ch. xxxix. 6, 7; lii. 11).

Vers. 6—15.—The purchase of the field. Ver. 6 resumes ver. 1, after the long parenthesis in vers. 2—5.

Ver. 7.—**Hanameel.** Another form of *Hananeel*; comp. Γεσέμ, in the Septuagint = Goshen, Μαδιάμ = Midian. In ch. xxxi. 38 the Authorized Version has *Hananel*, and the Septuagint Ἀναμεήλ (of course, the persons referred to are different). **The son of Shallum thine uncle.** It is strange that Hanameel should be called at once Jeremiah's uncle's son and his uncle; and yet this is the case—the former in vers. 8, 9, the latter in ver. 12. There is, therefore, no reason why we should deviate (as most commentators do) from the ordinary Hebrew usage, and suppose "thine uncle" in this verse to refer to Shallum, and not rather to Hanameel. But how are we to explain this singular variation in phraseology? Either from the fact that the Hebrew for "uncle" is simply a word expressive of affection (it means "beloved," see *e.g.* Isa. v. 1), and might, therefore, just as well be applied to a cousin as to an uncle; or else, upon the supposition that the word for "son (of)" has fallen out of the text before "mine uncle," both in this verse and in ver. 12.

Ver. 8.—**The right of inheritance** (or rather, *of taking possession*) **is thine.** The right, however, was dependent on the previous right of redeeming the land. Hence the speaker continues: **The redemption is thine; buy it for thyself.** The Law directs, "If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold" (Lev. xxv. 25). Jeremiah's kinsman, however, ascribes to him the right of pre-emption. This is not mentioned in Leviticus; but, of course, no one would care to purchase a property till he was sure that the next kinsman would not insist on redeeming it. No one, it may be remarked, could purchase land unconditionally—the usufruct of it till the year of jubilee was all that was legally transferable; and even the original occupant had only a life interest in his land, the ownership of which was, strictly speaking, vested in the commune. This seems to be the necessary inference from a comprehensive view of the passages relative to land in the Old Testament (see Mr. Fenton's 'Early Hebrew Life;' and an article in the *Church Quarterly Review*, July, 1880). **Then I knew,** etc. We may, perhaps, interpret this notice combined with that in ver. 6 thus: Jeremiah had had a presentiment, founded, perhaps, upon the distress to which his cousin had been reduced, that the latter would invite him to carry out the provisions of the Law; and his presentiments were generally so ordered by the Divine Spirit of prophecy as to be ratified by the event. Still, he had a measure of uncertainty till Hanameel actually came to him, and so demonstrated "that this had been the word of the Lord." In recording the circumstances, he not unnaturally reflects his later feeling of certitude in his description of the presentiment.

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Ver. 9.—**Seventeen shekels of silver**; *i.e.* about £2 5*s.* 4*d.* (taking the shekel at 2*s.* 8*d.*). This has been thought a small price. Thirty shekels were paid for the potter's field (Matt. xxvii. 7); fifty by David, for Araunah's threshing-floor and oxen (2 Sam. xxiv. 4). The Hebrew has "seven shekels and ten of silver;" hence the Targum increases the price by supplying "minas" before "of silver," bringing up the sum to one hundred and seven shekels. This, however, seems too much. Even if Jeremiah wished to be liberal, he would hardly have been able to go so far (probably) in excess of the market price. Who would have purchased the land on speculation, if Jeremiah had refused? The famine made life, the siege, a continuance of personal liberty, terribly uncertain. And, putting this out of the question, there may have been but a short time to elapse before the year of jubilee, when the land would revert to its original occupant (see above). The singular form of expression in the Hebrew, at which the Targum stumbled, may, perhaps, be the usual style of legal documents.

Vers. 10—14.—The Authorized Version is here so far wrong, on technical terms, that it seems best to retranslate the whole passage: "And I wrote (the circumstances) in the deed, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed the money in the balance. And I took the purchase deed, that which was sealed (containing the offer and the conditions), and that which was open; and I gave the purchase deed unto Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah (rather, Makhsciah), in the sight of Hanameel my uncle, and in the sight of the witnesses who subscribed the purchase deed, in the sight of all the Jews who were sitting in the court of the guard. And I charged Baruch before them, saying, Thus saith Jehovah Sabáoth, the God of Israel, Take these deeds, this sealed purchase deed, and this open deed; and put them into an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days." The deed was made in two copies, so that if the open one were lost, or suspected of having been tampered with, an appeal might always be made to the sealed copy. The latter was to be placed in an earthen vessel, to preserve it from injury by damp. It ought to be added that the words in ver. 11, rendered "containing the offer and the conditions," are difficult. "Containing" is not expressed in the Hebrew, and "offer" is not the ordinary meaning, though etymologically justifiable.

Ver. 15.—**Shall be possessed**; rather, *shall be bought.*

Vers. 16—25.—Jeremiah obeys the Divine command, but is so besieged by misgivings that he applies for a further revelation of God's purposes.

Ver. 17.—**Ah, Lord God!** rather, *Alas! O Lord Jehovah* (as ch. i. 6). **Too hard for thee.** It is the word usually rendered "wonderful," but rather indicating that thing or person lies outside the common order (comp. Gen. xviii. 14).

Ver. 18.—**Into the bosom,** etc. The ample dress of an Eastern rendering a bag or basket unnecessary (comp. Ruth iii. 15).

Ver. 20.—Even **unto this day.** A loose expression. Jeremiah simply means that signs and wonders equal to those wrought in Egypt have continued to the present time. **And in Israel**; rather, *both in Israel.*

Ver. 21.—Almost identical with Deut. xxvi. 8. The **great terror** which the Israelites inspired is constantly referred to (see Deut. ii. 25; Exod. xxiii. 27; Josh. v. 1).

Ver. 24.—**Behold the mounts** (see as ch. vi. 6). **Is given.** Resistance being hopeless, Jerusalem was virtually in the hands of its besiegers.

Ver. 25.—**For the city is given**; rather, *whereas.* It is a reflection of the prophet's.

Vers. 26—44.—The Divine answer. This falls into two parts. First, Jehovah repeats the burden of so many prophecies, that Israel has only to blame himself for his punishment (vers. 26—35); and then a bright future is disclosed beyond the gloomy interval of conquest and captivity—a future when men shall buy fields, and comply with all the legal formalities, precisely as Jeremiah has done (vers. 36—44).

Ver. 28.—**I will give**; rather, *I am on the point of giving* (present participle).

Ver. 29.—**And burn it.** A still more significant prediction to Jewish hearers than to us, for it implies that Jerusalem had become utterly rebellious, and deserved the punishment of the old Canaanitish cities. It was to be made a *chérem* (Deut. iii. 6).

Ver. 30.—**From their youth** (see on ch. iii. 24, 25; xxii. 21). **The children of Israel,** in the first half of the verse, must have a narrower sense than in the second half. The fall of Jerusalem is the climax of the series of punishments which the two separated and yet (in God's sight) united portions of the people of Israel have had to undergo.

Ver. 31.—**From the day that they built it.** It is useless to tell an impassioned orator that his words are not strictly consistent with primitive history. The Israelites may not have built Jerusalem, but Jeremiah was not to be debarred from the strongest form of expression open to him for such a reason. He means "from the earliest times."

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Vers. 34, 35.—Repeated, with slight variations, from ch. vii. 30, 31. "Baal" and "Molech" are identified as in ch. xix. 5 (= ch. vii. 31), and even more distinctly.

Ver. 36.—**And now therefore.** This introduces the strange and lovely contrast to the gloomy picture which has gone before. It will be observed that there is no direct reference to Jerusalem, but the capital was only emphasized before as the heart of the nation, and it would, of course, be no comfort to say that Jerusalem's inhabitants (alone) would be restored.

Ver. 39.—**One heart, and one way.** Unity is always given as the "note" of the ideal, Messianic period (comp. Zeph. iii. 9; Zech. xiv. 9; John x. 16). **That they may fear me for ever.** This reminds us of a phrase in the exhortation in Deut. iv. 10, as the next clause does of Deut. vi. 24.

Ver. 40.—**An everlasting covenant.** It is the "new covenant" of ch. xxxi. 31, etc., which is meant (for the phrase, comp. Isa. lv. 3; Ezek. xxxvii. 26). **That I will not turn . . . to do them good.** The comma in the Authorized Version impairs the sense. The prophet means, "That I will not cease to show them favour" (comp. Isa. liv. 10).

Ver. 41.—**Assuredly**; literally, *with faithfulness*; i.e. with perfect sincerity, without an *arrière pensée*, as the next words explain it; comp. 1 Sam. xii. 24; Isa. xxxviii. 3 (Graf).

Ver. 42.—**Like as I have brought**, etc. The prophet still has in his mind the thought expressed in ch. xxxi. 28, that the brighter part of his revelations must as surely be accomplished as the darker.

Ver. 43.—**Fields**; rather, *land*; the Hebrew has "the field," *i.e.* the open country (as ch. iv. 17, etc.). We must then continue "in this country," and in ver. 44, "men shall buy lands."

Ver. 44.—**Subscribe evidences**; rather, *write* (particulars of their purchase) *in the deed* (as ver. 10). **In the land of Benjamin**, etc. The catalogue of the districts of the Jewish kingdom heightens the realistic effect (see on ch. xvii. 26). Everywhere the old social system will be reproduced in its entirety. The land of Benjamin is mentioned first, on account of the property of Jeremiah at Anathoth.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 6—9.—*Faith tested by action.* Jerusalem is besieged; the fields are occupied by the invader; Jeremiah knows that the Jews will be driven from their country; he is a prisoner. Yet he buys of piece of land! The transaction is carried out calmly, carefully, with all legal exactitude, and every precaution against future mistakes as to ownership, just as if the prophet were at liberty to enter into possession and enjoy his purchase without fear of molestation. His conduct is striking; to those who heard his warnings of the approaching Captivity it would seem singularly inconsistent. But the secret of it is explained to us, and this shows it to be a sublime act of faith. It was right that Jeremiah should make the purchase under ordinary circumstances, to keep the land in the family. He was now urged by a Divine impulse, which made him feel without doubt that it was God's will that he should buy the land, and he did it without questioning. After he had made the purchase, however, he inquired of God for the meaning of it, and was assured that the land of Israel would revert to the Jews after the Captivity, and would be bought and sold again with confidence in security of possession. Jeremiah's purchase was to be an anticipation of that happy future. His conduct is thus an illustration of the influence of faith on outward actions.

I. FAITH WILL REVEAL ITSELF IN DEEDS. Faith is not a merely intellectual exercise. It is primarily that which connects thought with action, and it is invariably an active principle. "Faith without works is dead." Jeremiah showed his faith by his works. A man's faith may be measured by the influence it has upon his conduct. The trying time is when faith comes into conflict with present impressions. Then, if those impressions are vivid and faith is feeble, they may overcome it. It is useless to claim to have an unquestioning conviction in face of such a failure. The failure proves the deficiency of faith. We should all ask ourselves—How far does our faith mould our conduct? How different would our life be if our faith were to cease? Would the effect be but slight or would it be a very revolution? The answer to these questions will determine whether our faith is a solid reality or a dreamy sentiment.

II. THOUGH FAITH IS A SPIRITUAL GRACE, IT WILL INFLUENCE OUR CONDUCT IN SECULAR AFFAIRS. Jeremiah showed his faith by the very thorough way in which he carried through an elaborate piece of conveyancing business. He did not confine his

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faith to the temple and to his preaching. He showed it in the market-place and in business. The sharp line which we draw between the spiritual and the secular is false and irreligious. Religion will be satisfied with no limited sphere. It claims the whole domain of life. Faith cannot be confined to any section of our conduct. If it is real, it will be a broad fundamental principle influencing all we do. If our faith bears no fruit in our business, it is a vain and worthless thing.

III. FAITH IN GOD WILL LEAD TO IMPLICIT OBEDIENCE TO HIS WILL. Jeremiah believed that God wished him to buy the field, and he did so, though at first he could not discover the utility of the purchase. 1. Faith will lead *to obedience*. It has two sides—a passive side, that shows itself in trust, submission, resignation; and an active side, that expresses itself in obedience. There are those who seem to ignore the latter. To them faith is wholly receptive, simply a leaving of our case in the hands of God and accepting what he gives. But the obedience of faith is not less important than its submission. 2. This obedience must be *implicit*. From the nature of the case we cannot at first understand all the reasons of the command. If we could there would be no room for faith. But when we know that God is great and good, and know that a certain act is according to his will, faith will find her place in doing it in the darkness, resting assured that all is right.

IV. GOD'S PROMISES FULLY JUSTIFY HOPEFUL ACTION UNDER DARK CIRCUMSTANCES. Jeremiah's conduct looked inconsistent. It was justified by God's promise of the restoration. When all is dark in the present we are inclined to despair of the future. But the future is in God's hands, and he has promised deliverance and blessedness to his people. Faith in God, therefore, will be a parent of hope. Because we trust God, we know that he will fulfil his good promises, and therefore we can act as though we saw the accomplishment of them.

Vers. 16—25.—*The prayer of a perplexed soul.* I. THE GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE PRAYER. Jeremiah is sorely perplexed by God's command to him to buy a field when the Jews are about to be driven from the land and he is a prisoner at Jerusalem. He does not permit his perplexity to paralyze his obedience. But *after* he has done the thing commanded by God he naturally and rightly seeks an explanation of the strange Divine commission. It is right that we should bring our doubts and difficulties to God. Though we should not allow them to hinder our performance of duty, we cannot help feeling them, and if we have true confidence in God we shall frankly confess them to him. We often trouble ourselves sorely, without ground, because we keep our doubts to ourselves, and try to solve them in the twilight of our own confused thinking, when, if we had more faith or more courage, we should bring them to God to seek such a solution as may be vouchsafed to us in the light of his presence. The character of Jeremiah's prayer and the way in which he thus seeks relief from God are deeply significant. He does not begin by asking the meaning of the command that perplexes him. Most of his prayer contains no reference to this. It is devoted to a contemplation of God, of his nature, his grace, and the justice of his severe actions. Thus he prepares his own soul for a right view of God's dealings with him. It would be well if our prayers contained more of this contemplation of God. Let us understand that the deepest prayer is not petition, but communion. It is more important that we should be brought near to God and realize rightly his presence and nature than that we should ask certain definite things of him. Therefore that part of prayer which in words may consist of invocation and adoration, should not be treated as a mere introductory formula, such as that with which we address a person of title. It is neither a mere call like that of the priests of Baal to obtain a hearing (1 Kings xviii. 26), nor only an expression of praise and thankfulness as a fitting introduction to a request for further favours. It should be felt to be the most precious element in prayer, the means by which our souls are lifted into fellowship with heaven. If it secures this result, the chief end of our prayer is attained. Then, if ever, our difficulties will vanish and our wants be satisfied, even if there be no change in God's actions towards us.

II. THE LEADING DETAILS OF THE PRAYER. 1. A contemplation of the *greatness* of God (ver. 17). This is realized by a consideration of the stupendous works of God in nature. Thence we learn (1) that as God accomplishes such great works as are manifested in creation, no difficulty or failure can arise from his inability to bring about the

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very best condition of affairs; and yet (2) that surrounding such great works there must be ineffable mysteries, so that we may be perplexed by much that comes from so wonderful a being as God. 2. A contemplation of the *goodness and wisdom* of God (vers. 18, 19). God is kind to multitudes, and yet necessarily searching in his justice. Therefore it is apparent that he will require no unreasonable sacrifice and no useless exertion. His commands may appear arbitrary and capricious. But his character teaches us to trust that the strangest of them are governed by his mercy, justice, and wisdom. 3. A contemplation of the *providential action* of God (vers. 20—22). A review of providence should confirm our faith even under the strangest trials. God had delivered Israel in the past, fulfilled his promises in the face of apparently insuperable difficulties, and given them a rich inheritance. Was there not good ground to trust him after that? 4. A contemplation of the justice of God's *severest actions* (vers. 23, 24). From this we see that the calamities of judgment are deserved. That fact should increase our faith in God, though by itself it may make hope more difficult, as it did in the case of Jeremiah. 5. A *confession of perplexity* at God's command (ver. 25). This is not made till after the contemplation of the character and works of God. The contemplation has not destroyed the difficulty, but it has prepared the prophet to receive an explanation. Thus it is well that we should confess our doubts distinctly to God and ask for light, and if we do this after prayer and spiritual communion with God, we may hope that light will open upon us as it did upon Jeremiah.

Ver. 27.—*The omnipotence of God.* I. THE SOURCE OF THE OMNIPOTENCE OF GOD. 1. His *essential being.* He is the Lord, Jehovah, the Self-Existent. God is not only greater than all other existences, he differs from them in his essential being. He is eternal; they have come into being. He is self-contained; they are created. 2. God's *relation to all other existences.* He is the God of all flesh. He is the First Cause, the Source of the first being of all things, and the ground of their continued being. But for him they could never have been and could not now endure. We human creatures, "flesh," may realize this especially in regard to ourselves. Therefore to us in particular God, who created us all, and in whom we all live and move and have our being, must be almighty.

II. APPARENT LIMITATIONS TO THE OMNIPOTENCE OF GOD. 1. The *character of God.* We say that God cannot do wrong. But this simply means that his character is such that he never will do wrong. He is physically as able to do the actions which are wrong as those which are right. If he were not, there would be no goodness in his refraining, for purity is not impotence to do evil, but a will not to do it in face of the power to do it. Omnipotence is a physical characteristic. Goodness, the moral characteristic, does not destroy this by controlling the action of it. The power of the steam-engine is not lessened because the driver turns the steam on and off at will. 2. The *free-will of man.* This introduces an unfathomable mystery, which no philosophy has solved or is ever likely to solve. But the mystery is more especially felt on our side. If God created us and gave to us free-will, and, being omnipotent, can at any time destroy us and withdraw it, this must not be regarded as any real limitation to his power.

III. HOW A CONSIDERATION OF THE OMNIPOTENCE OF GOD SHOULD AFFECT OUR CONDUCT. We are not called to worship mere power. To do so would be to renounce the rights of conscience. We worship God, not because he is almighty, but because he is supremely good and morally great. But starting from this position, we have to take account also of the omnipotence of God. 1. It shows the utter *vanity of all resistance* to the will of God. This is a most obvious inference? The more strange, then, that it is so little acted on. We need to feel it as well as to believe it. 2. It should lead us to *trust* that God will overcome difficulties which to us appear insuperable. The restoration of Israel appeared impossible; the salvation of the world seems too great and difficult to be realized; there are special difficulties in special cases, but some with all, so that we may exclaim, "Who then can be saved?" But if "with God all things are possible" (Matt. xix. 26), how can we fix *any* limit to the ultimate triumphs of redemption? "The mercy of the Lord endureth for ever;" then God will always seek the recovery of his lost children. "Is anything too hard for me?" Then, in spite of present unbelief, impenitence, wild wanderings further astray, may we not believe that

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he will find his children at last? 3. These considerations should lead us to seek the *help of God's strength* in our weakness. How foolish for the sailors to weary themselves toiling in vain at their oars against the tide, when if they would spread their sails the strong wind would carry them swiftly on! How foolish of us to toil on only in our natural power and with mere earthly means, when there are heavenly influences of omnipotence ready to help us if we will seek them!

Ver. 39.—*Unity.* I. UNITY IS PROMISED AS A CHARACTERISTIC OF THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE FUTURE. This is unity of thought, "one heart," and unity of conduct, "one way." Men shall then see "eye to eye," discord and controversy cease, peace and amity prevail. There may still be diversity of ideas in the sense of personal difference, because individual characters, positions, and opportunities must still vary. But in a perfect condition there will be no discord. The variations will harmonize. So all will not do exactly the same thing in exactly the same manner. There will, doubtless, be various spheres of action and various personal styles of work. But these will not conflict. They will all tend the same way.

II. UNITY IS INVOLVED IN THE IDEA OF PERFECTION. 1. Unity of *thought.* Truth is one. It may be variously conceived; at first broken lights caught up in opposite quarters may look very different. But the more we eliminate personal "views," the more we can get of the white light of facts, the nearer we approach to the central verity, the more unity shall we obtain. Absolute truth is an absolute unity. This is apparent in mathematics. Two and two cannot be both four and five at the same time—four to one man, five to his neighbour. 2. Unity of *action.* As there is but one absolute truth, so there is but one absolute right. Under all circumstances there can be but one thing which is absolutely the best to be done. That one thing is the right. Till we find this, we make blundering attempts to reach it from different directions. Hence the contradictions in the conduct even in good men. When the right is found and followed by all, there must be unity of conduct.

III. UNITY IS TO BE REALIZED THROUGH THE PERFECTED INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY. It was promised as one of the great Messianic blessings. In Christianity we see the growing realization of those blessings. 1. This is accomplished by the *personal influence of Christ.* One powerful centre of attraction binds into unity all that comes under its influence. The sun makes one system of the several planets that revolve about it. The general of genius welds the scattered regiments of his army into one body through his common command over them and their common devotion to him. Christ exerts a similar influence. He is broad enough in his humanity and strong enough in his divinity to attract and influence all kinds of men. Thus "he is our Peace, who made both" (Jew and Gentile) "one, and broke down the middle wall of partition" (Eph. ii. 14). All may see a unity of truth in him who is "the Light of the world," and be led in one way as they follow his footsteps. 2. This unity is further realized in the *inwardness of Christianity.* The new covenant is written on the heart (ch. xxxi. 33). We differ most in externals; under various clothes there beats the same human heart. When we come to the heart we come to unity. Thus the inward principles of truth and love in Christianity tend to bind Christians together. We are divided because these have not yet their perfect work. No external compulsion will accomplish the same end. On the contrary, this will only aggravate internal dissension. Persecution is the parent of heresy; charity is the mother of unity.

Ver. 41.—*God rejoicing.* I. GOD HAS JOY. He is not indifferent, nor is he morose; we are to think of him as the "blessed" God, *i.e.* as essentially happy. The brightness and beauty of the world are reflections from the blessedness of God. Because he is glad, nature is glad, flowers bloom, birds sing, young creatures bound with delight. Nothing is more sad in perversions of religion than the representations of God as a gloomy tyrant. Less terrible, but scarcely less false, are those monkish ideas which deny the tyranny but cherish the gloom of a sombre divinity more suited to chill, dark cloisters than to that glorious temple of nature in which the eternal presence dwells and manifests himself symbolically. These fragrant meadows, broad rolling seas of moorland heather, rich green forest-cities of busy insect life, flashing ocean waves, and the pure blue sky above, and all that is sweet and lovely in creation, swell one

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symphony of gladness, because the mighty Spirit that haunts them is himself overflowing with joy. Our God is a *Sun*. And if divinity is sunny, so should religion be. The happy God will rejoice in the happiness of his children. Innocent mirth, though forbidden by Puritan sourness, can be no offence to such a God. The typical citizens of his kingdom are little children; and what is so joyous as childhood?

II. GOD FINDS JOY IN HIS CHILDREN. Here is the wonderful fact about the joy of God. He must have joy in his own purity and perfection. Then he has infinite resources at his command. The whole universe can be made to minister to his delight. All high and pure intelligences that form the choir of heaven aim at glorifying him. Yet he finds delight in such poor creatures as we are, in his fallen and erring children. How is this? 1. Because God is *love*. He loves all his children. Love finds delight in the loved; so God is compared to the bridegroom rejoicing over the bride (Isa. lxii. 5). 2. Because God is essentially *blessed*. The happy find sources of gladness in the most unlikely quarters, just as the cheeriest scenes cannot lift the load of sadness from those who are naturally mournful. God is so joyous that he finds joy even in us.

III. GOD FINDS JOY IN BLESSING HIS CHILDREN. He rejoices over them to do them good. God's joy is most unselfish. It is the greatest blessedness—the blessedness of giving rather than that of receiving. It is the joy of sacrifice. God, being good, can find joy only in good; being merciful, can find none in harshness. He must punish the wicked, but he takes no delight in that. Like the shepherd who has recovered the lost sheep, like the woman who has found the lost money, like the father who has welcomed the wanderer home again safe and sound, God rejoices in the return of the penitent, till his joy overflows and is caught up by the angels about his throne. From this we may learn (1) confidence if we return as penitents; (2) assurance that all our life is safe in his hands; (3) care not to grieve his Spirit; (4) desire to live in communion with him.

IV. GOD WILL CALL HIS CHILDREN TO SHARE IN HIS JOY. All joy is sympathetic. We call our friends and our neighbours to rejoice with us. But if we have special joy in any person we naturally desire this joy to be reciprocal. Christ desired his disciples to share his joy (John xv. 11). Joy is contagious. If we are with the happy and in sympathy with them, we naturally receive a share of their gladness. Whence comes the joy we anticipate in heaven? Escape from the evils of this life when God shall wipe away the tears from all eyes? Deliverance from sin and temptation? Reunion with the lost but not forgotten blessed dead? Opportunities for happy service? All these things and more; but these are not the sources of chief joy. That is to share the joy of God, to be "for ever with the Lord."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—*Silencing a prophet.* A short time before an attempt was made upon his life; now it is imagined that the prophet will yield to harsh treatment and intimidation. The natural heart of man is so foolish that it cannot but credit man with the authorship of Divine truth, and suppose that he can control and modify the inspired messages of God. Nay, the sinner is often so left to himself as to suppose that his own precautions will prevent the communications of God's Spirit, or at least the carrying of these into effect!

I. FAITHFUL WITNESSES OF THE TRUTH MAY SOMETIMES BE BROUGHT INTO GREAT STRAITS. God does not guarantee a smooth experience and an easy life to his servants. Quite the contrary. His Son prepares his disciples for suffering many things (Matt. x. 16—22). Jeremiah would seem to be alternately exposed to harshness and kindness—he was in the prison and yet in the palace. The bribe, or the deceitful promise, may be as great a trial as the cruelty. Seclusion for a prophet and patriot must have been very hard to endure at such a time, and full of spiritual perplexity. Great things were being done, and national destinies decided, whilst he was held fast, helpless, and with little reliable information of what was going on. So God often lays aside his servants just at a time when there would seem to be most occasion for their activity. "His thoughts are not as our thoughts."

II. THE WORD OF GOD IS NOT THEREBY HINDERED. 1. *It is not silenced.* (Ver. 1; cf. ch. xxxiii. 1.) The communion of the soul with God cannot be broken by external

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means. As well might one say, "Thus far, and no further," to the ocean or the day. Many of the grandest revelations of God date from prisons. 2. *Resistance only hastens its progress and fulfilment.* Persecution and martyrdom have done more for Christianity than a thousand direct agencies. How the voices multiply! 3. *Those who oppose it ensure its speedy visitation upon themselves.*

III. GOD WILL UPHOLD AND COMFORT HIS AFFLICTED SERVANTS. The greatest trial to Jeremiah would have been God's silence: at this season the "Word of the Lord" must have been his greatest consolation and reassurance. Earthly deprivation may be heavenly liberty. Sufferers for the truth know and feel that God is with them.—M.

Vers. 6—15.—*Purchasing by Divine command.* The passage a *locus classicus* for various questions and formalities connected with the Mosaic Law. Abraham bought a field for his dead; Jeremiah bought one for a nation yet unborn. If no other circumstance had been recorded concerning the latter, this alone would entitle him to be enrolled amongst the fathers of the faithful.

I. GOD'S SERVANTS ARE SOMETIMES CALLED TO PERFORM STRANGE AND SINGULAR ACTIONS. The prophet bidden to purchase a field when the land is overrun by the Chaldeans; a poor man to procure and expend money upon a speculation for which there was no earthly security; a prisoner to acquire land there seemed so little likelihood of his ever seeing. Much of Christian duty is summed up in that experience. We are not to stumble at earthly anomalies or anachronisms, but to live and labour and spend "as seeing him who is invisible."

II. THE WILL OF GOD IS A SUFFICIENT REASON FOR DOING SUCH THINGS. That is, the *revealed* will. Men who act by revelation have not to ask for reasons before acting. Obedience is their *rôle;* afterwards they may ask for light. Christians have to commit their way unto the Lord, and trust where they cannot trace. They are led by a higher reason, which cannot err.

III. WHAT GOD COMMANDS OUGHT TO BE DONE PROMPTLY, LOVINGLY, AND WITH EXACTITUDE. Jeremiah at once performs the duty. He hastens to relieve his kinsman from perplexity and loss. And the business part of the engagement is executed with the greatest care and all the formalities of law. No flaw is suffered to enter into the bargain. The importance and duty of Christians being model business men. What is done for God and under his supervision should be done thoroughly. Justice precedes and facilitates charity.

IV. TRANSACTIONS APPARENTLY SMALL AND TRIFLING MAY HAVE GREAT MEANINGS. How different the feelings of the parties to this transaction! The money absolutely of little amount; relatively it was worth much. We are reminded of the widow's mite. That document was the title deed to a kingdom. *This is the spirit in which Christians should do business.* We ought never to forget that we are heirs of the kingdom. The world has been sold under sin, but we are free. Let us strive to "lay up treasure in heaven." Let us make our title clear to its liberties and joys. In the meanest undertaking let us be guided by this spirit. In the confidence of Christ let us redeem the world. Let our motto be "Everything in the spirit of Christ!" Men cannot be just and honest unless they are inspired, even for the least things, as Jeremiah was. A large and general brotherliness, an implicit faith in God's Word, ought to govern us in all our affairs. Above all, our own relation to Christ, our personal transactions with him, should at once, with prayer and faith, be made sure!—M.

Vers. 16—25.—*The prayer of Jeremiah.* I. CLEAR AND UNMISTAKABLE DUTIES SHOULD BE FULFILLED ERE MEN ENTER UPON DIVINE EXERCISES. The deed had already been executed.

II. CIRCUMSTANCES OF TRIAL AND PERPLEXITY SHOULD LEAD MEN TO THE THRONE OF GRACE.

III. THE KNOWN CHARACTER AND PAST ACTION OF GOD SHOULD INFLUENCE MEN'S JUDGMENTS OF PRESENT EXPERIENCES AND STRENGTHEN THEIR FAITH. It is good to rehearse these even in private devotions.

IV. SINS SHOULD BE FREELY AND HONESTLY CONFESSED.

V. ONE SAINT MAY INTERCEDE FOR MANY SINNERS.

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VI. THE PRAYER OF FAITH IS ANSWERED. (Vers. 26—44.)—M.

Vers. 37—40.—*The unities of the Divine kingdom.* (Cf. John xvii.) I. UNITY IN THE EXPERIENCE AND PRIVILEGES OF SAVING GRACE. (Ver. 37.)
II. UNITY WITH GOD.
III. UNITY IN SPIRIT AND LABOUR WITH ONE ANOTHER. (Ver. 39.)
IV. UNITY OF DESTINY. (Ver. 40.)—M.

Vers. 1—44.—*A story of God's sustaining grace.* This whole chapter may be summed up under some such heading as this. For it begins with showing us God's servant Jeremiah in a position in which he sorely needed sustaining grace, and then it proceeds to narrate the threefold process by which this grace was communicated to him. The manner in which God sustained Jeremiah is very much akin to that in which he will sustain all his servants who may be in similar need. If any be so now, let them give heed to this record. Note—

I. THE NEED OF GOD'S SERVANT. Ver. 2 tells us that Jeremiah was at this time shut up in prison. His confinement was not so severe as that which he had suffered in his former prison; but yet there was very much in his present circumstances to make him need the sustaining grace of God. The story of his imprisonments is full of interest, but it has to be gathered here a little and there a little from different parts of his prophecies. These have been compiled on a principle which it is impossible to discover. Events of early date are placed in later chapters, and those of later date in early chapters. The chronological confusion is complete. Hence it is the task of every student of these prophecies to disentangle this confusion so far as it may be done. In saying this, nothing is charged against the inspiration and authority of the book. That remains intact; but our reverence for what is so evidently of God in the book does not hinder that we should note and regret the disorderly way in which some human hands—whose we know not—have put together its various parts. Tracing out, however, the history of these imprisonments, it would seem that they were brought about somewhat as follows. Jeremiah had clearly foreseen and foretold that the ungodliness of the people would bring down the Divine chastisements. Moreover, he discerned and declared with equal clearness that the instrument of God's wrath would be the rapidly rising empire of Babylon. He saw how everything yielded to the might of her armies; that no power, not even that of Egypt, could withstand her assault. But all this was by no means so clearly seen by those to whom Jeremiah was sent. They did not believe in the nearness of God's judgments, and were not a little angry with the faithful prophet for denouncing them. But Jeremiah saw also that, certain as was the approach of these judgments, they probably would be mitigated if, instead of exasperating the armies of Babylon by useless resistance, they submitted themselves and acknowledged her supremacy (cf. ch. xxvii.). But the same spirit in the nobles and princes of Judah and in the people generally, which made them refuse to listen to him when he told of God's judgments coming upon them, made them impatient of his oft-repeated counsels to do now the best thing under the circumstances—bow to the Babylonian storm, and so, though they could not save all, yet save some of their cherished possessions. But at length it became evident that Babylon did mean to assail them. Instead, however, of adopting either of the two better methods—of humbling themselves before God and imploring his protection, or of conciliating the Babylonian king, they formed alliance with Egypt (ch. xxxvii.), notwithstanding Jeremiah's solemn assurance of the uselessness of such alliance. But in the ninth year of Zedekiah the Chaldean army besieged Jerusalem. Jeremiah (ch. xxxiv. 2) plainly tells the king how hopeless all resistance is. Under the alarm of this siege, the wealthy Jews released their poorer brethren, of whom, contrary to God's Law, they had made bond slaves (ch. xxxiv.). But the Egyptian army coming to their aid (ch. xxxvii. 5), the Chaldeans raised the siege. Thinking now that all cause for fear was gone, the Jewish leaders quickly went back to their old ways, and, though indignantly denounced by Jeremiah (ch. xxxiv.), enslaved their brethren again. But he had taken advantage of the withdrawal of the Babylonian forces to quit the city. It was no place for him. His purpose, however, was prevented. Foes not a few, to whom his fidelity had been hateful, now seized on him on the pretence that he was about to desert to the

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Chaldeans (ch. xxxvii.). In the insolence begotten of their fancied deliverance, they thought they might do anything to God's servant. They therefore dragged him before the princes, procured his condemnation, smote him, and then cast him into deep dungeons, where, had he lingered long, death must soon have put an end to his misery. But the King Zedekiah, whose mind was ill at ease, and who could not help believing Jeremiah, whilst allowing himself to be overawed by the violence of those around him, sent for the prophet and caused him to be placed in less severe custody. But he was not to stay there long. His former enemies came round the king, and brought such accusations against him that the king, weakly yielding as his manner was, gave him up to their will; like as Pilate delivered Jesus. Speedily they flung him into a dungeon, which appears to have been a disused well, the bottom of which was still deep in mire. There they leave him miserably to perish. But again he is delivered. An eunuch of the court intercedes for him, and he is drawn up tenderly and carefully, as his half-dying state probably required, from the horrible pit into which he had been cast, and brought back again into that milder captivity which is indicated by "the court of the prison," and where we find him when this chapter (xxxii.) opens. Now, if we try and realize the prophet's condition, we can easily see how a despondency like to that of John the Baptist when he sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask him, "Art thou he that should come," etc.?—we can see how a like despondency might well have fallen upon the prophet's mind. He was no robust, stern Stoic, to whom rough treatment and the scorn and hate of his fellow-men were as nothing. His piteous pleading for his life (ch. xxxvii. 20), his ready yielding to the king's suggested subterfuge (ch. xxxviii. 27), his reiterated confessions of his distress, the long wail of his lamentations, all reveal a man who, though in the strength of God's grace he would not flinch in delivering the message God had entrusted to him, whatever it was, whoever might oppose, nevertheless felt keenly the perils of his position and the misery of his lot. Again and again had he been seemingly given over unto death, and even now there was nought but the poor protection of the word of the weakest of monarchs to save him from the rage that was ready to destroy him the first opportunity that should be given. His whole horizon was dark, unillumined by any cheering ray of hope. If the besieging armies did their worst—and it seemed certain that the obstinacy of the people would provoke them to do so—what prospect of deliverance and restoration could there be then? For himself and for his country the outlook was all dark.

II. But, next, see HOW GOD MET HIS NEED. He did this in a threefold manner. 1. *He led him to commit himself openly to the faith of the restoration of Israel.* He had proclaimed this restoration many times before. He was now by a public significant act to avow again his confidence in what God had promised. This is the meaning of the purchase of the land told of in vers. 6—15. In the most explicit formal manner he was to do this which his own predictions of the Babylonian conquest seemed to render absurd. It seemed like throwing money away. Why the vendor wanted to sell the ground we do not know. The conviction that all was lost for Judah may have led to it. But when the offer was made, as God told Jeremiah it would be, he saw that it was from the Lord, and that he was, by purchasing it, to testify to his faith that the land should be restored to them again. Hence he did all in the most formal manner: paid for it, took receipt, registered the purchase, and had duplicate made out, handed over the documents to Baruch in presence of many witnesses. Now, had Jeremiah refused to buy this property, it would be tantamount to his apostasy from faith, to his renouncing all his trust in God. His despondency would bid him do so. But the thought of throwing up all faith, renouncing it, and denying God, the very thought seems to have provoked a blessed reaction, and to have made him resolve that he would make it yet more difficult for himself to go back from his faith by committing himself to it in this open, deliberate, and formal way. *Thus God made him use what faith he had in order to his winning more.* "To him that hath," and uses what he has, "shall be given." It is ever so. Have you little of the spirit of prayer? Pray, and more will be yours. Little love to God? Do something especially and avowedly for him, and your love will deepen. As with the body and the mind, in trade and all departments of life, the use of what strength we have gains more. 2. *By leading him to lay all his difficulties before God.* This is the meaning of the prayer in vers. 17—25. After the prophet had committed himself by this purchase of the land, a purchase so irrational and

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absurd as it would seem in many eyes, and as it perhaps partly seemed even in his own eyes, he felt need still of more assurance and confidence than he yet possessed. And so in this prayer he pours out his perplexities before God. And if we analyze this prayer, we shall see that he begins by going over in devout confession and adoration the many reasons which ought to establish his faith. First he confesses the sure truth—nothing is too hard for the Lord. Then he proceeds from this general truth to several proofs of it in Israel's own history—how, in spite of all difficulty, God redeemed, preserved, and settled his people in the land he promised. Then he turns to the perplexing facts which, at the moment, were so staggering his own mind—the dreadful wickedness of the people and the actual presence of God's judgments. How, in the face of all this, could God's promises be fulfilled? It is as if he had said, "Lord, I believe, I ought to believe, but I am sore perplexed, I desire to believe yet more; help my unbelief." Such seems to have been the meaning of this prayer. It is prayer because this is its meaning, though there is not one word of petition in the whole of it. The prayer has to be read between the lines. And God does ever so read the desires of his servants, even when not expressed in words, or when words are used that are not formal prayers. Nor can we doubt that thus coming to the Lord with his perplexities was of great help to the prophet. It must have been so; it ever is so. 3. *God gives him fresh grasp of his promises, new assurance of the truth of his Word.* This is the third and last step in this sustaining grace, of which this whole chapter tells. The account of this answer to the prophet's prayer is given in vers. 26—44. He gave him to feel afresh the blessed truth that *nothing* was too hard for the Lord (ver. 27). Therefore it mattered not, even though he could not understand all God's ways, though the Chaldean armies were thundering at the gates of Jerusalem, though the people were so hopelessly wicked. "Therefore" (ver. 36) "saith the Lord," and then follows a whole series of "I wills" and "shall be's," in which God again bears in upon his servant's soul the certainty of the things he had already declared. And more than he had declared should be—a spiritual restoration as well as a literal one. And then (vers. 43, 44), referring to Jeremiah's own transaction, "fields shall be bought in this land," etc. That which now seemed so unreasonable and hopeless should be matter of everyday occurrence in the blessed times of restoration which God would surely bring about. The instruction, therefore, for every perplexed soul is—Use what faith thou hast; tell all thy perplexities to God; receive the new assurance of his faithfulness he will surely give.—C.

Ver. 5.—*O blessed death!* "Until I visit him." Zedekiah does not seem to have been a bad man, though he did evil. Weak rather than wicked. One like our own Charles I. or Louis XVI. of France. One of those men unhappily called to places of great responsibility and difficulty, without the moral strength requisite for so arduous a post. A sadder life than that of King Zedekiah, the last king of Judah and Jerusalem, cannot be conceived. It is a piteous tale. Bereaved, a captive, blinded, he was dragged to Babylon, and there died. And it is because the prophet of God recognizes that death to such an one could not but be a sweet messenger of relief, therefore he calls it "the Lord visiting him." True, the visit of the Lord often means the wrath of the Lord. He will "visit the sins of the fathers," etc. But it yet more often means the *goodness* of the Lord. "The Lord hath visited and redeemed his people." He visited Hannah. He visits his flock. And this gentler meaning it has here; for the sore punishment of his sins Zedekiah had already been visited. This visit, therefore, tells of God's merciful visitation.

I. DEATH NOT ALWAYS A VISIT OF MERCY. Not to those who die in their sins. It is represented often as the judgment of God. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," as they who die impenitent and unbelieving fall.

II. BUT DEATH IS MORE OFTEN THE LORD'S VISIT OF MERCY. It is: 1. *To those whom God punishes in this life.* Zedekiah was an instance. Cf. those of whom St. Paul says (1 Cor. xi. 33) that they were judged now that they might not be condemned with the world. And probably there are many such. 2. To the sorrowful *and those whose lives are a prolonged pain.* We speak of death for such as being a merciful relief; and we are right. 3. *To all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.* Death for them is the Lord's visiting them—Christ's coming again, as he said he would, and

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receiving them unto himself, that where he is they may be also. Which kind of visitation of the Lord shall death be to *us*?—C.

Vers. 6—15.—*A parable of redemption.* For the sake of variety and interest, it is lawful now and then to make the transactions of earth tell of the transactions of heaven; to make prosaic matters of fact—as the redeeming of this field—parables of spiritual realities. Let us so deal with this narrative. Here was—

I. A POSSESSION IN AN ENEMY'S POWER. The field, as the whole land virtually was so at that very moment. So man.

II. THE LORD PROMPTING REDEMPTION. Jeremiah knew that it was "of the Lord." God is the Author of redemption. "He so loved the world that," etc. "God was in Christ reconciling," etc.

III. THE REDEEMER VOLUNTARILY UNDERTAKING THE WORK. Jeremiah might have refused. So Christ thought not his equality with God a thing he should tenaciously retain, but emptied himself (Phil. iii.). "For our sakes, though he was rich, yet he became poor."

IV. THE SEEMING HOPELESSNESS OF SUCH REDEMPTION. What likelihood did there seem in Jeremiah's payment that he should ever possess the land? What could Christ's cross do to redeem man? "The offence of the cross."

V. REDEMPTION ACCOMPLISHED AND ATTESTED. The prophet paid the silver, and the transaction was attested in due form. Christ paid our ransom, and that that great purchase was valid was attested by the resurrection from the dead: that was the seal.

VI. WITNESSES ARE COMMISSIONED TO DECLARE THE TRUTH. (Vers. 12, 13.) So Christ commanded his apostles to testify of what he had done.

VII. THE TWOFOLD TESTIMONY. (Ver. 14.) There was that which was sealed and that which was open. So is it of the great redemption. There is a testimony that is sealed, hidden from the world, but revealed to the believer by the Spirit of God in his inward experience, the witness of God in his soul, the Spirit bearing witness with his spirit. And there is that which is open—the historic evidence of the resurrection of Christ and of the truth of Christianity.

VIII. THE DEPOSITARIES OF THIS TESTIMONY. The prophet put his in an earthen vessel. We, too, have this treasure in earthen vessels. Let the literal suggest the spiritual; Jeremiah, Paul.

IX. THE UNDERLYING AND EFFECTUATING WILL. (Ver. 15.) The Lord *would* have the land to be restored, the Captivity *should* return. So he "*will* have all men to be saved." Have we claimed our share in this redeeming work?—C.

Ver. 19.—*Nothing hid from God.* "Thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men." No truth more forgotten than this. Men assent to it, but it has no power over the vast mass of men, and far too little power even over religious men. How different it is with the presence or absence of our fellow-creatures! We have often much to conceal from them, and we would often make great efforts to prevent them knowing much of our lives. Hence it makes all the difference in the world to us whether they be with us or away from us. It regulates our conduct, our words, our looks, our very tone and movement. But how little of such effect does the thought of the Divine eye seeing all and always what we are and do, even to the understanding of our thoughts afar off! Therefore such forgetfulness of God's presence as that which we are all of us so liable to be guilty of requires that we should diligently consider the many proofs of the truth declared in this verse. Note some of them.

I. HE HAS LAID DOWN LAWS TO REGULATE AND GOVERN THE WAYS OF MEN. He has done this not only for those that are open and manifest, but those that are most secret as well. He is a "discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (cf. Ps. cxxxix.). "God looketh at the heart." Now, he could not thus largely and minutely lay down these laws if he did not know completely the ways which they concern.

II. HE DISCOVERS THEM. If we have been engaged in some secret way, or such as we thought was secret, where no eye was upon us as we imagined; if afterwards some one meets us and tells us all that we did, we know that, unseen to us, he must by himself or by others have been present at that secret hour. Now, thus we know that God has been ever present. For: 1. *He tells us all about them.* What is memory? what,

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especially, is conscience, but God telling us that *he* is perfectly acquainted with all that we thought unknown? 2. *He tells others of them.* He told David (1 Sam. xxiii. 12) that the men of Keilah would deliver him up into the hand of Saul. He told Joseph of Herod's purpose to kill the infant Saviour. He warned the wise men from whom Herod hoped to have acquired the knowledge he needed. And again, he warned Joseph about Archelaus. And many such instances there are. Now, they all show that God knows all the ways of men.

III. HE TURNS THEM WHICH WAY HE WILL. Sometimes he gives men their heart's desire, satisfying the longing soul. Sometimes he overrules them for ends far other than the doers of them designed. As when they crucified our Lord (Acts ii. 23), God ordered which way their sin should issue, which was quite other than they thought (cf. history of Joseph). Sometimes he baffles and denies them altogether. If he did not, this world would be hell. What if all the sin men conceive of they were to commit! Hence (Gen. xx. 6) God says he withheld Abimelech from sinning against Abraham, and suffered him not to touch Sarah. And God is for ever graciously strangling sin in its very birth. But all this shows that "his eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men."

IV. HE RECOMPENSES THEM. 1. When our secret ways have been evil, cannot we tell in the darkening of the face of God that he knows all? And when they have been such as the Lord delighteth to see in secret, do not our hearts know when we come to him that there is the answering smile? 2. And he recompenses them in his present outward dealings with us. The sinner's most secret sin finds him out not seldom in this world. And the patient continuance in well-doing, however humble and obscure, rarely fails to meet with its reward. 3. And God will judge them in the last great day. Then the thoughts of all hearts shall be revealed. "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." Again is it made evident that he knows all. He is "the Father who seeth in secret."

CONCLUSION. Understand what is the right use of this great doctrine. Not that we should be trying every hour of the day to be thinking of the all-seeing eye of God. We cannot, and God does not intend that we should, be ever thus conscious of his presence. Children are not of the presence of their parents. They are utterly unconstrained. But should need arise for their parents' help, should they be tempted to do what they know their parents would forbid, then in a moment they become conscious of their presence, and the needed aid is asked for, and the tempting sin is resisted. Now, thus should we remember the continual presence of God. "The right state of mind plainly is to have the thought of God's presence so perpetually at hand that, as with Joseph in his great temptation, it shall always start before us whenever it is wanted." This is living with God and communion with Christ; and it is won by prayer and close walking with him, and blessed are they who win.—C.

Ver. 27.—*Truth confessed, but not realized.* "Is there anything too hard for the Lord?" In ver. 17 the prophet had confessed "nothing is too hard for thee," but it is evident that, though he thus confessed the blessed truth, he did not realize it so as to enjoy it and get the comfort of it (cf. homily on vers. 1—44). Now, there are many causes which hinder our realization of this truth which we nevertheless both confess and believe. But they may all be summed up under the three headings of trouble, guilt, and sin. It was the first of these, though not exclusively, which was clouding the prophet's mind, and making even this axiom of Divine truth seem doubtful for the time. Glance at these causes of this sad questioning whether some things be not too hard for the Lord, and their several cures.

I. GREAT TROUBLE. Cf. circumstances of the time and of prophet especially. Oh, what doubt and misgiving do the troubles of life, the terrible events, "the stings and arrows of outrageous fortune," cause to souls not a few! It was so here. Now, observe *the antidote to this doubt.* To strengthen his faith the prophet draws an argument from the creation. Then, with no resources from without, God formed the earth and the world. Then, when the material out of which the ordered universe should come had all to be brought into order, "the earth was without form and void, and darkness," etc. Then, when all was created, all had to be preserved and daily sustained. Let any one contemplate the proofs that these facts give of the existence, the power, the

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wisdom, and the beneficence of God, and the question, "Is anything too hard for thee?" can meet with but one answer. How can any doubt the Divine resources in view of the creating and sustaining providence of God.

II. GUILT. If it be hard sometimes in the face of the calamities of life to realize the fulness of the Divine resources, it is harder still in the face of human guilt. Is there a God able and willing to supply my material and temporal need? is a question less difficult than that which asks whether there be a God able and willing to pardon my sin. For to minds not few nor feeble, the forgiveness of sin seems an insoluble problem. If the punishment of sin be righteous, and every witness affirms that it is, ought God to remit it? And if it be inevitable, the sure reaping of the previous sowing, can God remit it? Have we not something here that is too hard even for the Lord? If in all departments of nature, we everywhere see effects surely following their appropriate causes, and if spiritual death be the appropriate effect of sin, how can this cause and effect be severed any more than any other? True, the human will can step in and arrest or turn aside this or that effect; we see this perpetually. But here is a question, not of power, but of right, not in the sphere of the material, but of that which is moral. It is a case in which mere power goes for nothing. What, then, is to be done? *The atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ solves the problem.* He, in our humanity, offered to God for us that perfect sacrifice whereby all who claim their share in its benefits are pardoned, accepted, and saved. "God was in Christ, reconciling," etc. (2 Cor. v.). It is everywhere recognized that a true confession of wrong done, and an earnest entreaty for forgiveness, should suffice to remove all wrath on account of such wrong from the heart of the offended one. That law which God enjoins upon us he observes himself. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit," etc. But such confession of human sin and intercession for its forgiveness Christ offered in humanity to God for us, and *so* God can be just and yet the Justifier of him who believeth in Jesus. Thus is this hard problem solved; the "Lamb of God taketh away the sin of the world." But there is—

III. SIN. Can God subdue that in the heart of a man? When we see the outrages, the duration, the strength of hold, the universality, the attractiveness, the prestige, and the love of sin, it does seem as if the subjugation of this was too hard even for the Lord. To turn back the tides, to reverse the law of gravity, to alter any other law of the universe,—this were an easy task compared with the stupendous change which must be wrought in man before the love of sin can die out of him, and the love of God rule in its stead. What endeavours have been made! what schemes devised! what philosophies elaborated! but all in vain. Hence, despair for ourselves and for others too often predominates in our souls. Evil we are, and evil we must be. Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? *Can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit? But "there is nothing too hard for the Lord." The history of the Church of God proves that there is, *in the regenerating, sanctifying Spirit of God*, that power which is needed here. He is the renewing, transforming, sanctifying Spirit. Baptized with the Spirit, "I walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." May we more and more, as we may and should, in our own experience, prove this true.—C.

Vers. 31—33.—*Love's labour apparently lost.* As we read this record (ver. 33) of the persevering and earnest, but nevertheless fruitless, labours of God's servants, and remember that they were sent by the Lord, we are almost led to ask, "To what purpose is this waste?" We can understand loving, earnest labour persevered in, though nothing may come of it, when those who so toil are sustained by hope, even though it may be sometimes hoping against hope. But "love hopeth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things," and "never faileth." How many and how pathetic are the stories that might be told where such love has toiled to save some reprobate from the doom he would persist in bringing on himself!—the loving wife, sister, mother, striving to save those who won't be saved! How full this weary world is of such cases! But it is evident that these continue to labour and pray because they cannot *know* that they shall fail, and their hope is that they shall succeed. How David fasted and wept whilst his child was yet alive! but when the child was dead, David arose and ate, anointed himself, and put on his royal robes. And when his servants asked him

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wherefore he so altered his behaviour, he said, "Whilst he was alive I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell if God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again?" It was hope that sustained the sorrowing king; but when hope was gone, he gave over his fruitless toil. Now, all this we can understand and sympathize with. But in the long-continued ministry of Jeremiah and others like him, when all the while God knew what the end would be, how apparently wasted it would all be, when he could never have any hope of a different result from that which actually occurred, the inquiry is suggested—Wherefore did God commission, and wherefore does he still, such fruitless toil? "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning." There can be nothing contingent with him. Hope is a mental condition impossible to God; he cannot be said to hope for anything. It is entirely human; but to an omniscient and omnipotent Being who "ordereth all things after the counsel of his own will," hope, or doubt, or uncertainty of any kind cannot be. Therefore, knowingly, with full certainty that all his servant's severe labour would not bring the people to repentance, as in fact it did not, nevertheless God commissioned him and his fellow-servants to go and speak to them. How are we to explain this? Reasons suggest themselves in connection with—

I. THE PROPHET HIMSELF. 1. *That his trust in God might not fail.* Had the career of the guilty nation been cut short because God foresaw what the certain end would be, such certain foresight being impossible to any but God, the faith of his servants would have been severely strained. They had ever heard of God as the long-suffering God. They would have found it hard to believe that, if but more time had been given, and a longer ministry allowed, and the whole truth had been put before the people perseveringly and earnestly, they would after all have remained unrepentant. The miserable paralysis of doubt as to the Divine equity would have fastened on them, and their power as his prophets would have thenceforth ceased. 2. *That trust and love might be greatly increased.* This could not but be when the prophet saw that the long-suffering of God was no mere word, but a reality, a reality greater than could have been conceived. What human authority would endure to be despised and set at nought as God endured that his should be? "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity," etc.? Such was once and again the adoring exclamation of those who witnessed and marvelled at the all but infinite patience of God. And this too when all the while God knew, as his prophet did not, that there was no hope. "We are saved by hope;" but *there is no such salvation for God.* He goes on blessing and doing good to those whom he knows will turn upon him in defiance and black ingratitude to the last day of their lives. It is wonderful. The Saviour went about doing good amongst a people whom he *knew* would crucify him. What an added conception of the Divine love does this fact give! Now that his servants the prophets might yet more know and rejoice in the God in whom they believed, God was and is long-suffering to those whom nevertheless he is compelled to condemn. 3. *The prophet's own spiritual improvement.* Such labour, severe though it be, is not lost on him who engages in it. Was not "the Captain of our salvation made perfect through sufferings," and those of a kindred kind? And for the discipline and development of the spiritual powers of his servants, to further in them that which is well pleasing in his sight, and for which process the unseen and eternal world will, in all probability, have constant though blessed employ, —for such reasons God keeps his servants in the world, and spares the world, guilty and ready for condemnation though it be.

II. THE WITNESSES AND ALL THEY WHO SHOULD AFTERWARDS HEAR OF HIS JUDGMENTS ON THE GUILTY NATION. 1. *The righteousness of God would be vindicated.* All would see that it was not without cause God dealt with them as he did. 2. *Sinners in all ages would be warned* not to presume on the long-suffering of God. St. Paul says of these ancient records, "All these things were written for our learning." 3. *Sin would be seen to be exceeding sinful.* Men are ready to attribute their sorrows to any and every cause but sin. But by thus branding sin with God's mark of sore displeasure, men would be better able to resist its attractions and overcome its power.

III. THE UNREPENTANT PEOPLE THEMSELVES. God having borne with them so long, now that at length his judgment had come, the remembrance of that long-suffering would: 1. *Silence them.* All would feel that God was just when he spoke against them, and clear when he condemned them. That Ps. li. and other penitential psalms

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bear many marks of having been adapted to, if not produced by, the sorrows of the Exile; cf. too Ezra's confession and prayer. 2. *Humble them.* Jeremiah declares once and again that it is their "pride" which was causing them to persist in their evil ways (cf. ch. xiii. 17). They had trusted in their national descent, on the possession of so many and so great privileges; cf. "The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, . . . are these" (ch. vii.). As they realized their present misery they would see the worthlessness of all those lying words in which they had so fondly trusted, and they would be bowed down with shame, as they now knew what their pride had brought upon themselves and their children. "Humbled in the dust" would be the fitting description of them as they thought of the way in which they had despised the long-continued and loving warnings of God. 3. *Convert them.* For God intended that they should be restored; he would bring them again, give them a heart to know him (cf. vers. 36—44). And no means could be more adapted to subserve this end than those which God employed. Had they been cut off in their guilt, or had the Exile taken place much earlier, there could not have been the feeling which we know was aroused, and which was so salutary that they were without excuse. The wise physician knows that there are fit times and seasons for the successful administration of his medicines, and till such times all administration of those medicines would be of no avail. And so, until a right condition of mind was brought about in the exiled people, no real conversion could take place. They must be without excuse before they could be made to feel that they were so, and therefore a further reason why God bore with them so long, that this their utter inexcusableness and their undeniable guilt might be the more deeply felt and more contritely and sincerely confessed. 4. *Accomplish the number of his elect amongst them.* For it is not to be thought that the prophet's ministry was utterly lost. The better part of the people were called out, educated, and prepared for the purifying discipline which awaited them by means of it. And it was that which brought the exiles back sadder but yet wiser men. And during the Exile the souls of the people were nurtured by the prophet's words which, during this prolonged ministry, he had spoken to them. That ministry was one proof out of so many more that God's Word shall not return to him void, although, in regard to immediate and much-desired effect, it may seem as if all were apparently lost. Now, all these considerations which apply to Jeremiah and his ministry and the long-suffering of God with Judah, apply with equal force to like long-suffering of God now—for God often repeats his mercies and judgments both—and happy shall we be if the gracious purposes of God in his forbearance are realized by us.—C.

Vers. 36—41.—*The refiner's fire.* The better part of Judah were cast as precious metal into a crucible by their being sent into exile at Babylon. And the effect was as that which results from such purifying process. Note—

I. WITHOUT DOUBT THEIR EXILE TRIED THEM AS FIRE. Fire is often the symbol of pain; and that there was indeed pain and sore distress in the exiles' lot is certain. Degradation, slavery, loss of their land, their high privileges as the people of God, in short, of their worldly all, had to be submitted to by them; and they lived, where they were permitted to live, at the mere caprice of a powerful, despotic, and merciless monarch. What that caprice could do, and often actually inflicted in the way of cruel tyranny and oppression, the books of the Bible which belong to the times of the Captivity, and the sculptures brought from those lands and now in the museums of this and other countries, clearly reveal—the merciless slaughters and the horrible punishments, etc. And all this woe they had brought on others—as their children—who were entirely innocent of their parents' wrong. "The fathers had eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth were set on edge." And to add to their distress was the bitter reflection that they were designed to have filled a position so entirely different and better; that they were intended to be the first in the favour of God, but now had become last; and all this by their own persistent, wilful wickedness, wickedness persisted in in spite of every kind of warning, protest, and entreaty that God could send them. Yes, it was as fire, as a furnace seven times heated.

II. BUT IT WAS NEVERTHELESS AS A REFINER'S FIRE. It was to issue in their good. For it did not destroy them. They were to be brought out of all this woe. "I will bring them again" (ver. 37). And it should work them good by separating them from:

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1. *Their sins.* They were torn away from the scenes, the people, the places, the manifold circumstances, which were inseparable from that idolatry into which they had so often fallen. 2. *And from those who tempted them thereto.* For that loose, evil multitude which were dealt with apparently less sternly than themselves at the first, were the prompters and the persuaders to that wickedness which had wrought them so much harm. Those who were obnoxious and therefore, in ch. xxiv., compared to the figs which could not be eaten, were, though left awhile in the possession of their own land, at length destroyed. The corrupt and poisonous leaven was taken utterly away, so that that which was sound and healthful or capable of becoming so might be preserved. The pure ore was separated from the base alloy, the worthless dross, by the action of this refiner's fire.

III. IN PROOF OF THIS, note: 1. God brought them back to their own land. 2. They had given them "a heart to know" God. 3. And their after history proved this. For they were a noble people for generations afterwards. Of course, there were the less worthy amongst them; but let their records be studied, their thrilling Maccabean history, for example, and it will be seen what a refining process that was through which they had been made—as was so necessary for them and for mankind at large, who were to be blessed by means of them—to pass. The absence of prophets and prophesyings, which is so marked a feature of the history written on that page which separates the Old Testament from the New, instead of being a reproach to them, is rather a proof that their general national health was such that the sharp surgery, the stern ministry, of the prophetic order was not then needed as it had been, so deplorably, in former days.

IV. WHAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE between them and the baser sort who were destroyed. It was the possession of the Spirit of God. The holy fire enkindled by him had been all but quenched, but not entirely; the dying embers could be made to glow with radiant heat once again. But of that fire God has said, "It shall ever be burning on the altar, it shall never go out;" and though they had all but smothered it beneath the heap of idolatrous superstitions and practices, and other evil compliances with wrong, it was burning still. And the exile across that wide desert to the plains of Babylon let in again the air from heaven, and the fire burnt up once more. And that this might be, God dealt with them as he did, and as he ever does, blessed be his Name! in like circumstances.

CONCLUSION. Paul's question, therefore, comes to our mind as we study such history as this: "Have ye received the Holy Ghost?" Seek him; for he will baffle the power of the destroyer, and, better still, if we will but follow his leading, he will keep us from ever needing to be cast into the crucible as these were, and from needing the refiner's fire. That would have been best of all, but thank God there is a second best. "Covet earnestly the best gifts."—C.

Ver. 42.—*The ratio of sorrow and joy.* I. THERE IS SUCH RATIO. Sorrow and joy are not flung down at hap-hazard into this world at the caprice of the Ruler of all, and irrespective one of the other, only that for the mass of men the sorrow is far greater and more pervading than the joy. But the relations between these two it is the glory of Scripture and of the gospel especially to reveal.

II. SCRIPTURE TEACHES IT. Here in this verse; cf. also Ps. xc., "Make us glad according to the days," etc.; Job ii. 10, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not also receive evil?" parable of Dives and Lazarus: "Thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented" (Luke xvi.).

III. NATURE ILLUSTRATES IT. It is said that on the Scotch lakes the depth of the lake is almost always the same as the height of the surrounding hills. And is it not the same with the great depths of ocean and the lofty mountains of the world? They have long, long winter in the Northern climes, but when the light does come back, the day so stretches out that you can read by the light of the midnight sun. And if we look into the faces of men, those indices of the soul within, it will be found that the looks of sorrow and of joy are about equally distributed. God is not a partial, unjust Father, petting one and neglecting others of his children. Sometimes we think so, but a larger survey will lead to truer thought.

IV. IT IS A TRUTH FULL OF COMFORT. For it teaches: 1. *That if sorrow be sent, joy is*

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not far off. "If I had been a little child among the Israelites, I think I should have known, when father set the bitter herbs upon the table, that the lamb was roasting somewhere, and would be set out too—'With bitter herbs shall ye eat it'—and so if there be bitter herbs, the dainty dish is near" (Spurgeon). 2. *That the two come from the same hand.* If there be a designed proportion then, not two independent minds are at work, but one only; ratio and proportion ever argue unity of mind. There is not an evil god who hurls sorrow upon men, and another a gracious God who sends only joy. That was the old Manichæan heresy, which is not dead yet. But the truth is that there is a likeness, a proportion between the good which God sends upon his people and the evil he has brought upon them. From one hand both come. But—

V. THE RATIO IS NOT EQUAL FOR THE CHILD OF GOD. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." The proportion of the evil we suffer to the good we shall enjoy is not that of equals, but that of the very little to the infinitely great.

VI. THE RELATIONSHIP ALSO IS THAT OF MOTHER AND CHILD. Sorrow is the mother of joy. Cf. our Lord's own metaphor: "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world." "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Cf. also above: "Our light affliction . . . worketh for us," etc., so that joy is begotten of sorrow.

VII. BUT THIS CAN ONLY BE FOR THE CHILD OF GOD. Therefore—

"Help, Lord, that we may come
To thy saints' happy home,
Where a thousand years
As one day appears;
Nor go
Where one day appears
As a thousand years
For woe!"

C.

Vers. 6—15.—*Jeremiah showing his faith by his works.* Jeremiah, as a prophet of Jehovah, had not only to utter warnings and predictions, but to show, on needful occasion, that he himself believed in them. He who would have others obey the Lord, must keep on persuading them to obedience by being prominent in obedience himself. Observe—

I. HOW THE LORD PREPARES JEREMIAH AGAINST A DIFFICULTY. Hanameel, we may take it, was coming in any case with this proposition of purchase, and, but for the Divine warning, might have come on the prophet unexpectedly, so that he would hardly know what to do. There may have been many considerations to perplex Jeremiah. But all perplexities were removed by a plain commandment. Moreover, Jeremiah was helped to come into an obedient and restful mood of mind by the very fact that the visit of his relative was foretold. He was made to feel that God's eye was on him—on his ways, his needs, his difficulties. Things he himself could not prepare for, God prepared for. Instead of the prophet having to ask, "Shall I buy or shall I not?" his way was made clear by a plain commandment. And surely we have here an indication how God ever watches over his true servants. We make difficulties greater than they otherwise would be by neglecting to ascertain whether there be not some clear expression of God's will concerning them.

II. THE EXAMPLE HERE GIVEN TO US OF THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH. Jeremiah, left to himself, might very well have said that this was no time either for buying or selling. The King of Babylon's army would soon have the whole country, and where then could be the worth of purchases and contracts? Let us for a moment suppose there had been no Divine commandment at all, and that Jeremiah had been left to his own judgment to decide on Hanameel's demand. If he had refused to buy, then there would not have been wanting those to exclaim that Jeremiah, so eloquent about the neglected duties of others, was shirking his own duties. On the other hand, if he had bought, then he would have been viewed with suspicion, as not really believing, after all, in the alienation of the land to Babylon. And of course, actually buying as he did, no doubt

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some sarcastic criticisms were made on his conduct. But then, through all, he was secure in the certainty that he was doing God's will. The transaction, however inconsistent or ridiculous it might look to others, was really one of the most prudent and well-based that ever man engaged in. Jeremiah himself could not well see how things were going to come right again, but he trusted in the foresight and omnipotence of Jehovah.—Y.

Ver. 33.—*Man's neglect of God's teaching.* I. GOD'S ATTITUDE AS A TEACHER TOWARDS MAN. God's complaint is that man turns to him the back and not the face. Hence we are to understand that God turns his face to us, full of meaning and very earnestly. Consider that expression, "I will guide thee with mine eye." Of course all such expressions are purely anthropomorphic, but behind them there is the truth that, when God speaks to us, it is in the same way as we do when we are most earnest and concerned in speaking. We speak then in every feature.

II. GOD'S ASSIDUITY AS A TEACHER. Rising early and teaching them. The effort to make the people understand truth and duty is continuous and unremitting. Nothing was left undone that could be done, so far as the *Teacher's side* was concerned. Laws and symbols, great providences, great deliverances, great punitive visitations on other peoples, punishments of men like Korah and Achan and Saul, chastisements like those of David,—thus Israelite-history abounded in lessons from God. Here is instruction from the great Teacher to all teachers. God was ready to seize on every opportunity to give a lesson, for opportunity is a great part of success. And seeing that God is thus declared among his people as a great Teacher, we should look on the Old Testament as a lesson-book, and study how far it may be useful to us. For though we have our own peculiar lesson-book in the New Testament, yet even the New Testament becomes clearer the better we understand the Old.

III. MAN'S ATTITUDE AS SCHOLAR TOWARDS GOD. His proper attitude is with the face, eyes looking on the Teacher, an expression of interest manifested, ready with the lip to ask further instruction and explanation.

IV. THE FACES OF THESE PEOPLE WERE TURNED TO OTHER TEACHERS. The fact is, man must ever be learning from somebody; and Israel, with the back to God, had its face towards the priests of idolatry, the ministers of cruelty, and was obedient to all their worst instructions. Let every one who has truth to teach and heavenly light to give remember that he is a rival of those who teach falsehood, error, cruelty, vice, superstition. If he is not successful in teaching the principles that liberate the spirit, then others will be successful in leading it into the worst of bondage.—Y.

Vers. 36—41.—*The bonds of abiding attachment to God.* Jeremiah has seen the war prospect, and it is one of siege, captivity, and destruction. He speaks as one who has the long-threatened hour before his eyes (ver. 24). But God, looking from a higher point, sees the enduring bright result beyond. Observe in this passage—

I. GOD'S THOROUGH GOOD WILL TOWARDS HIS PEOPLE. His will is ever to show favour and do good to mankind. That will is always in action, but it can only be in manifestation when men themselves, by their spirit of submission to God and obedience to his directions, make such a manifestation possible. As he is thorough in his anger against the rebellious and idolatrous, so he is thorough in his favour towards the repentant. It is well that we should ever remember this deep good will of God to men when things are going wrong with us. The fault of untoward experiences may be in us or it may be in others; it cannot be in God. We must not put down to arbitrariness in him the painful workings of that law which manifests itself in sequence to human ignorance and folly.

II. GOD'S SUFFICIENT OPPORTUNITY TO DO GOOD TO HIS PEOPLE. The confident tone that runs through this passage is most encouraging. Bad as the people have been, far as they have been driven, widely as they have been scattered, God can put all right again if only the people are willing to have it so. All God waits for is to hear the prodigal nation say, "I will arise and go to my Father." If only *we* give God the opportunity, he will make us to abound in supplies for our necessities and blessedness. We let many opportunities slip for doing good, and never do we use any such opportunity to the full. But God delights in the opportunities men give him, and here is an

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illustration of how he presses forward to use them. "I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul." Only be willing to be a plant of God's own planting, and there is no reason why you should not feel the whole heart and soul of God going out for your highest good.

III. GOD WORKING TOWARDS THE UNITY OF HIS PEOPLE. One is reminded of the unity proclaimed in Eph. iv. 3—6: one God, one people, one heart, one way, one covenant because an everlasting one, one character for the future. This unity stands out in contrast to the previous scattering. The previous scattering was only an outward symbol of the scattering within. If even the people had continued in Jerusalem, that would have given them no unity save the unity of place, which is the most precarious, mocking, and delusive of all unities. But the new unity is that of one heart. As one life flows through all the organs of the body, making the life of each the life of all and the life of all the life of each, so God will make it among his true people. God binds each to himself by the law written in the heart, and so all are bound to one another.

IV. THE EVERLASTING COVENANT THUS MADE POSSIBLE. God has now found something deep in the heart of his people whereby he can get an abiding hold. His covenant finds a firm anchorage in the regenerated inward man. With one heart and one way there is a starting-point for doing Divine good, not to one generation, but to many. How much good we may hinder by our spiritual blindness and indifference! And on the other hand, what copious showers of blessing may be the result of a timely turning to God!—Y.

Ver. 42.—*Evil the measure of good.* I. WITH REGARD TO CERTAINTY. Here is evil actually upon the city and country. Evil that has come, not in some inexplicable, unexpected way, but in correspondence with prophetic announcements, extending over a long time and frequently repeated. And now out of the very perceived certainty of this evil, God takes occasion to create ground of hope and encouragement for the people. He who without fail has sent chastisement for the disobedient will equally without fail keep all his promises to the obedient. It is the principle of sowing and reaping. The harvest will assuredly be according to the seed that is sown. We have the choice of alternatives, and only of alternatives. Either by our negligence we shall lay ourselves open to have God bring great evils upon us, or by our obedience and regard we shall receive all that great good which God promises to those who obey.

II. WITH REGARD TO AGENCY. The emphasis of the verse is especially upon the agent. Those who fail to see that it is God who has brought all this great evil will fail to get much comfort from his most comprehensive and gracious promises. Behind the unseen instruments we must see the unseen Director and Controller. We must try to trace out the wrath of God in manifestation against the unrighteousness of men. As we trace the miseries that come from human selfishness and self-indulgence, we must learn to see God in them—God as well as man; we must recognize righteous law as well as wicked folly. We are not to depend for the best things upon uncertain man, but upon God, with his unvarying love, his exhaustless power.

III. WITH REGARD TO EXTENT. One would not wish for its own sake to measure the height, and depth, the breadth, and length, of human misery, but we have to do it to estimate its cause and bring about its cure. And always the peril is to look upon it superficially and hastily. Now, by this very superficiality and haste we miss a great source of gladness. For our estimate of possible good must have for one of its elements our experience of actual evil. A man must sink low if he would rise high. We do not mean, of course, that he must sink low by an exceptionally depraved and vicious life; that would be to recommend what Paul denounces—sinning in order that grace may abound. We must sink low in our estimate of ourselves. We must see that, unless we also repent, a great evil will inevitably come upon us, whereas, if we are wisely obedient, we shall be the recipients of a splendid good—a good which ever has its forerunners in the gracious promises of God.—Y.

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EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A chapter of promises, having reference, first, to the people and kingdom in general (vers. 4—13), and then to the royal and priestly offices in particular (vers. 14—26). The first part is but the expansion of passages in the preceding prophecy, to which this chapter is attached by the opening verse. The remaining portion is less closely connected; it is occupied by promises of the perpetual duration of the house of David and of the Levites. It should be noticed by the student that there are difficulties connected with the authorship of vers. 14, 26 (see below).

Ver. 1.—**In the court of the prison**; rather, *of the guard* (ch. xxxii. 2).

Ver. 2.—**Thus saith the Lord, the Maker thereof**, etc.; rather, *Thus saith Jehovah, who doeth it, Jehovah who frameth it that he may establish it, whose name is Jehovah.* It was needless to express the object of the verbs. Jehovah's great purpose is the regeneration of his people. To "frame" or "form" is synonymous with "purpose" (see on ch. xviii. 11). The meaning of the verse is that Jehovah's very Name is a pledge of his fidelity to his promises (comp. ch. xxxii. 18). To "establish" is synonymous with to carry out."

Ver. 3.—**Mighty things**; rather, *secret things* (literally, *inaccessible*). It must be admitted that this introduction hardly corresponds to the sequel, which does not contain any special secrets, as we should have thought. Either vers. 2, 3 have been inserted by a later (inspired) editor, whose mind was absorbed in high thoughts of the latter days—for this view may be urged the style and phraseology, which are hardly those of the surrounding chapters, hardly those of Jeremiah; or else we must adopt Hengstenberg's perhaps over-subtle suggestion, which, however, does not touch the question of the phraseology, "that throughout Scripture dead knowledge is not regarded as knowledge; that the hope of restoration had, in the natural man, in the prophet, as well as in all believers, an enemy who strove to darken and extinguish it; that therefore it was ever new," or, in the words of Jeremiah, "great and secret things, which thou knowest not."

Vers. 4—9.—The houses of Jerusalem, destroyed by the engines of the besiegers or filled with dead bodies, shall be restored; the captives shall be brought back; their sins shall be forgiven, and God be glorified.

Ver. 4.—**By the mounts, and by the sword**; rather, *because of the mounds* (see on ch. xxxii. 24) *and because of the weapons of war.* The latter are the warlike instruments used by the besiegers from their batteries or breastworks.

Ver. 5.—**They come to fight with the Chaldeans, but it is**, etc. The passage is obscure, so obscure that we cannot avoid inferring that it is corrupt. "They come" could only refer to the Jews, but these would rather be said to "go out;" the Hebrew writers are particular in distinguishing between to "come" and to "go out." Besides, there is no grammatical connection with the preceding verse. The Septuagint omits "they come," but the passage still remains enigmatical.

Ver. 6.—**I will bring it health and cure**, etc. "Health" is properly the fresh skin which grows over a healing wound (as ch. viii. 22; xxx. 17). First the city is spoken of, then its inhabitants. **Will reveal unto them**; or perhaps, *will roll unto them* (comp. ch. xi. 20; xx. 12). In this case the figure will be that of a mighty stream (comp. Amos v. 24; Isa. xlviii. 18; lxvi. 12). **Truth**; rather, *continuance* (comp. ch. xiv. 13).

Ver. 7.—**I will cause the captivity . . . to return** (see on ch. xxix. 14). **Will build them** (see on ch. xxxi. 14).

Ver. 8.—**I will cleanse them**, etc. Restored prosperity without spiritual purification would be of no avail; how could it give happiness (comp. ch. xxxi. 34)?

Ver. 9.—**And it shall be**; viz. Jerusalem. **A name of joy**; rather, on the analogy of Isa. lv. 13, etc., *a monument of joy*; i.e. joy-giving. **They shall fear and tremble.** As feeling the contrast between their "unprofitable" idol-gods and the faithful God of Israel.

Ver. 10.—**In this place**; *i.e.* "in this land," as in ch. vii. 7 and elsewhere. **Shall be desolate**; rather, *is desolate.*

Ver. 11.—**The sacrifice of praise** (see on ch. xvii. 26).

Ver. 12.—**An habitation**; rather, *a pasture* (including the idea of an encampment). The expression reminds us of ch. xxiii. 3, 4, but it is preferable to take the present passage in its literal sense rather than as metaphorical.

Ver. 13.—**In the cities**, etc. A parallel description to ch. xvii. 26; xxxii. 44. **The vale**; rather, *the lowland* (about the Mediterranean, on the south). **The south.** It is the Negeb, or south country, which is meant.

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Under the hands; rather, *at the beck*. **Of him that telleth them.** Comp. Milton, 'L'Allegro'—

"And every shepherd tells his tale
Under the hawthorn in the dale."

Virgil, 'Ecl.,' iii. 34—

"Bisque die numerant ambo pecus, alter et hædos."

Vers. 14—26.—These verses are omitted in the Septuagint, and some leading critics think that both the style and the contents point to a different author from our prophet. In particular it is urged that the promise of a multitude of Levites and of descendants of David is isolated among the prophecies of Jeremiah, who elsewhere speaks of a single great representative of David as the object of pious hope, and of the intercourse between Jehovah and his people as being closer and more immediate than under the old Law. A variation in the form of expressing the Messianic hope is, however, not of much importance. Isaiah, for instance, sometimes refers to a single ideal king (ix. 6, etc.); sometimes to a succession of noble, God-fearing kings (xxxii. 1; xxxiii. 17).

Ver. 14.—**That good thing which I have promised**; viz. in the parallel passage, ch. xxiii. 5, 6 (which see).

Ver. 15.—**The Branch of righteousness**; rather, *the Plant of righteousness* (see on ch. xxiii. 5).

Ver. 16.—**Wherewith she shall be called**; viz. Jerusalem; in ch. xxiii. 6, the parallel passage, the subject is "Israel," unless there is a corruption of the text. **The Lord our righteousness**; rather, *The Lord (is) our righteousness*.

Ver. 17.—**David shall never want a man**, etc. This is, in fact, a republication of the promise given by Nathan in 2 Sam. vii. 12—16. It agrees in form with the announcements in 1 Kings ii. 4; viii. 25; ix. 5.

Ver. 18.—**Neither shall the priests the Levites**, etc. It has been thought that this passage is inconsistent with the prophecies of a time when the ark should no more be remembered (ch. iii. 16), and when all should know Jehovah from the least to the greatest (ch. xxxi. 34). But though sin offerings would in this glorious time become things of the past, yet thank offerings are expressly excepted from abolition (ver. 11), and in ch. xxxi. 14 a special latter-day promise is given to the priests. Moreover, Ezekiel, who repeats the prophecy of the new spiritual covenant (xi. 19; xxxvi. 26; xxxvii. 26), gives an elaborate sketch of a new temple with a sacrificial system (ch. xl., etc.); and, if there is any inconsistency, we find the same one in the latter part of Isaiah. In Isa. lxi. 6 the whole regenerate people of Israel is called "the priests of Jehovah;" but in Isa. lxvi. 21 the prophet distinctly states that there will be, in some sense, a priestly class within the chosen people.

Vers. 20—22.—The constant, regular succession of day and night is an emblem of the equally regular supply of royal descendants of David and of Levitical priests, and the countless grains of sand are symbolic of the wonderful increase of their numbers. At first sight the latter part of the promise seems a little unlike a blessing. But we have seen already (on ch. xix. 3) that the members of the various branches of the royal family probably occupied the principal offices of the state, and the prophet imagines the future in forms borrowed from the present. A numerous sacerdotal class seemed equally necessary for the due magnificence of the ritual; and we must remember that preternatural fertility of the soil was a standing element of Messianic descriptions. The expressions used are, no doubt, hyperbolical, but the meaning seems clear enough. (Hengstenberg's notion, that the prophet rather indicates the abolition of the royal and sacerdotal distinctions (comp. Exod. xix. 6), is surely very far-fetched.)

Vers. 23—26.—The permanence of Israel as the people of God, with rulers of the house of David.

Ver. 24.—**This people**; *i.e.* not Egyptians or Babylonians (as some have supposed), but the people of Judah, regarded as alienated from Jehovah (hence the touch of disparagement), as elsewhere in Jeremiah (ch. iv. 10, 11; v. 14, 23; vi. 19; vii. 33, etc.). There were unworthy Jews, who, seeing their nation fallen from its high estate, despaired of its deliverance and regeneration. **That they should be no more**, etc.; rather, *so that they are no more a people*—no more an independent people. The "two families," of course, are the "two houses of Israel" (Isa. viii. 14), *i.e.* the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*An invitation to prayer.* I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE INVITATION. (Ver. 1.) 1. It was to Jeremiah; *i.e.* (1) to a *good man*. All men may pray, but it is "the supplication of a righteous man that availeth much in its working" (Jas. v. 16); and (2) a *prophet*. Therefore a prophet needs to pray. No man knows so much

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or is so far advanced spiritually as to be able to dispense with prayer. Christ prayed. 2. The invitation came to Jeremiah *in prison*. Stone walls cannot shut out God from us, nor prevent our souls from rising in prayer to him. The persecutor cannot rob his victim of his choicest jewel. God often visits the soul in scenes of earthly distress. 3. The invitation came a *second time*. God repeatedly visits his troubled children. The prayer of yesterday will not make that of to-day needless. 4. The invitation to prayer *did not bring deliverance from trouble*. Though God visited Jeremiah in prison once and again, the prophet still remained there. We have no right to think that when God visits us for good he will remove our earthly trouble; he may find it better to bless us in it. Therefore, on the other hand, the continuance of the trouble is no evidence that we are deserted by God—perhaps the reverse, because "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth."

II. THE GROUNDS OF THE INVITATION. (Ver. 2.) God gives to Jeremiah good grounds for assurance in prayer before inviting him to pray. We cannot pray to an unknown God with intelligence and earnestness. To pray with faith we must have grounds of confidence. These are offered to the prophet in the manifestation of the nature of God in his works, and the revelation of his higher character in the sacred Name, Jehovah. 1. The manifestation of God in *his works*. (1) He is the Maker of all things; therefore he has power to make all right again. (2) He *established* the world; therefore there is a permanence in the law, and will, and procedure of God, which no passing accidents can set aside. 2. The revelation of *his higher Name*, "Jehovah;" "The Lord in his Name." This revelation not only suggests the self-existent and eternal supremacy of God, so infinitely superior to all those evil powers of life feared by us timid mortals; it is also associated with the willingness of God to save, since it was revealed in connection with the deliverance from Egypt (Exod. iii. 14), it may well be quoted in anticipation of the deliverance from Babylon.

III. THE CHARACTER OF THE INVITATION. (Ver. 3.) 1. God *invites to prayer*. Therefore (1) we may have good assurance that he will hear prayer; and (2) nevertheless, we are reminded that, though he is favourably disposed to us, he waits to bless us until we "call unto" him. 2. God *promises a revelation in response to prayer*. Here is an encouragement that the prayer will not be fruitless. The Bible does not represent prayer as a mere subjective exercise; it treats it as a power prevailing with God, securing from him blessings asked. We have here a special encouragement for the perplexed to pray for light. Mysteries are not necessarily eternally hidden. Some once hidden have been revealed (*e.g.* Col. i. 26); others may yet be made more clear. The seeker after truth should be a man of prayer. The deepest spiritual truth is not discoverable by speculation; it is revealed in communion. It is seen through spiritual thought and sympathy with God, aided by his Spirit's inspiration.

Ver. 6.—(See on ch. xxx. 17.)

Ver. 8.—*Forgiveness and cleansing.* I. FORGIVENESS AND CLEANSING MUST BE CLOSELY ASSOCIATED. When God pardons he also cleanses. The first justification that treats as righteous by forgiveness is the seed of the second justification that makes righteous. It is often noted that it would be neither just in God nor wholesome for us that sin should be pardoned without the creation of a clean heart. But we should observe further that it would not even be possible for this to happen. For the essence of forgiveness is reconciliation, not a mere remission of penalties. Even if these are remitted, while personal enmity is cherished there can be no forgiving. To forgive is to effect a mutual reconciliation after alienation through wrong-doing on one side, by concession on the other. The very act of reconciliation implies such a change in the person forgiven as involves the cessation of all opposition on his side. Now, in the root of it sin is just departure from God, and its ripe fruit is enmity to God. Forgiveness must, therefore, by its very nature, imply a cleansing from this sin.

II. GOD PROMISES PERFECT CLEANSING AND FORGIVENESS. 1. This is *given by God*. He only can forgive, since it is against him that we have sinned. He only can cleanse, since only the Creator can create anew. 2. This is given *through Christ*. Hints of the means only appear in the Old Testament. The gospel revelation brings it more clearly before us (1 Pet. ii. 24). In the sight of the cross we see the great assurance of deliver-

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ance from sin in the revelation of the means by which this is brought about. Since Christ has died for our sins we have good reason to ask for forgiveness and cleansing. 3. The promised cleansing and forgiveness are *perfect*; i.e. (1) from all sins—none can be too black for the "Lord of all flesh" to overcome, for "is there anything too hard for him"? and (2) a complete deliverance—a forgiveness that forgets and bears no grudge, a cleansing that leaves no stain and produces a regeneration of life.

III. PERFECT FORGIVENESS AND CLEANSING ARE TO BE RECEIVED THROUGH REPENTANCE AND FAITH. 1. As God accomplishes the perfect deliverance from sin, it is foolish for us to begin a small and imperfect and certainly futile cleansing on our own account. But we must desire the justification and the pardon, else it is unreasonable to expect God to bestow them. This desire, real and active, is *repentance*. 2. Then must follow *faith*. It is not necessary for us to understand the *rationale* of the atonement in order to profit by the fruits of it. But it is necessary to trust in the Saviour. Faith is a very different thing from an intellectual comprehension and conviction of a complex set of doctrines. It is a personal trust. This trust is an essential condition of cleansing and forgiveness. Till we yield ourselves to the influence of God's grace, and trust to his love, we cannot expect him to deliver us.

Ver. 9.—*The Church an honour to God.* What is here promised to the Jews finds its fulfilment, not in the Jews alone, nor in them at all until they submit to the Christian influences of the new covenant, but in all the spiritual Israel—in the Church of Christ.

I. CONSIDER THE FACT THAT THE CHURCH IS AN HONOUR TO GOD. It is described as a "monument of joy" because God takes delight in it (ch. xxxii. 41), and as "a praise and an honour" because by means of it God's glory is manifested abroad. This, in turn, is an honour to the Church. Though God picks his fallen children up from the mire of sin he does not leave them in shame and degradation. The prodigal is stripped of his rags and clothed with the best robe. God regards his Church, even here, with the stains of war and toil and sin upon her, as capable of manifesting forth his glory. What greater mission could she have?

II. INQUIRE INTO THE SOURCES OF THIS HONOUR. How comes it that the Church is an honour to God? Her own excellences can scarcely be considered as glorious in themselves. It is not in the inherent worth of these that we find the secret of the glory given by the Church to God. The Church is formed by God, redeemed by his mercy, delivered by his power, maintained by his help. Her very existence is a witness to God's forgiving and restoring grace. All that she does for good is not accomplished by her own might, but through the inspiration of his Spirit. The picture is an honour to the painter because it is the fruit of his well-directed labour. We do not admire it only for its simple beauty. If it is a representation of the humblest scene in nature, the reality must be infinitely more beautiful than the picture; yet we give great admiration to the work of art because it is a work and because it reveals art. So the Church is an honour to God as the fruit of his work and of Christ's sacrifice.

III. NOTE THE EFFECTS OF THIS HONOUR. 1. It is to impress the world. The Jews were a standing witness of the power and goodness of God to the neighbouring nations. The Church of Christ is called to a similar mission on a world-wide scale. The very existence of the Church as the ark upon the waters preserved and blessed by God is one of the greatest means of making known the grace and glory of redemption. More eloquent than any words is the silent testimony of the good and peaceful lives of godly men. 2. Therefore a great responsibility rests upon all Christians. God entrusts his honour to his Church. If, therefore, she can glorify him, she has also the power to bring dishonour on his Name. The "good soldier of Jesus Christ" is an honour to his Captain; but the sluggard, the coward, and the traitor are a discredit to his high name, and their faithlessness does something to smirch the beauty of the banner of redemption.

Vers. 10—13.—*Town and country life.* In describing the happy future of Israel after the restoration Jeremiah draws a pair of idyllic pictures of town and country life. Both the city of Jerusalem and the outlying regions were so depopulated and wasted by the Chaldean invasion that it was difficult to believe the sun of prosperity would ever shine on them again. But under the providence of God there is a wonderful recuperative power in the human world as well as in the natural. It is remarkable

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how soon the battle-field with its hideous relics becomes a flowery meadow. The rapid revival of the French nation after the war of 1870 was an astonishment to Europe. This may be accounted for partly on natural principles, since war rarely touches the permanent resources of a country; if it drains the stream, it does not stanch the fountain-head. The capital of a country is always being consumed and remade in peaceful times, so that the destruction of it in war is not so great a calamity as might appear at first sight. But a true revival of prosperity depends on higher causes. A nation is only really prosperous when its people are advancing in moral tone, when there is a Divine root to their recovery. This is implied in the description of restored Israel. Let us consider the two pictures of the restoration.

I. TOWN LIFE. In the happy city described by Jeremiah there is a repopulation of the deserted streets. What a melancholy sight is a city in ruins, silent and solitary! The very suggestion of life and bustle increases the gloom of the unnatural stillness that haunts the place. The first step towards restoration is to bring back the inhabitants. The strength of a nation resides ultimately in its population. No empire has yet been ruined through over-population; many, from Rome downwards, by the decay of population. There was a great economic truth in the Hebrew estimate of the value of a thickly inhabited country. In the city we see this concentrated. That is a human world in itself. If man is a social being, if co-operation and sympathy are good things, there we may look for true advancing prosperity. But the congregation of human beings in a city aggravates the evils of life when these are not restrained. In the city disease, misery, vice, and crime find their victims. The saddest sight in modern civilization (?) is the wretched condition of the back slums of the greatest cities of Europe, and the moral state of too much of the remainder. Men do not find prosperity and happiness by merely crowding together. In Jeremiah's picture of the new Jerusalem there is no room for those ugly scenes that Victor Hugo and Dickens make familiar in their representations of Paris and London. There is joy. There is worship. There is sacrifice and devotion to God. When the temple is the true centre of the city, when religion presides over her commerce and her pleasure, then, and then only, can true happiness be enjoyed by the citizens.

II. COUNTRY LIFE. Jeremiah paints a companion picture of country life with skilful adaptation of parallels and contrasts. The scene is pastoral. Prosperity is witnessed in quiet industry and growing wealth of flocks and herds. Such a life is no more idle than that of the city—often less so, and it is more calm. The stimulus of competition and the aid of co-operation are lost, but the reflections of solitude are gained; communion with nature takes the place of communion with man. This may be an ideal state of happiness to him who knows how to enjoy it. Both forms of life will be blessed when rightly followed; neither when abused. Dr. Johnson showed his wisdom in appreciating the merits of town life, but Cowper had good reasons for preferring the country. Country life has its vices, its ignorance, narrowness, and brutality, its poverty and lonely distresses. This also needs a higher life to keep it pure and happy. The Christian may find good in whichever condition his lot is cast, since God can bless both to him.

Ver. 15.—"*The Branch of righteousness.*" If these words were intended by the prophet to refer to a succession of kings the promise they contain is nevertheless fulfilled in one, and one only, Jesus Christ. The glory of redeemed Israel is to find its consummation in the restoration of the throne of David with righteous government. The true glory of redemption is seen in the righteous rule of Christ. Much of what is taught here is similar to the suggestions of a former passage (ch. xxiii. 5). But the verse before us has also some lessons of its own, viz.—

I. CHRIST IS A BRANCH (OR SPROUT) OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. He is of the stock of David, preserving the tradition and inheriting the rights of the royal family. But he is far above the old kings in character as well as in nature. Jeremiah repeatedly insisted on a fact that is only too apparent in the historical books of the Old Testament—the fact that the ruin of Israel was largely due to the bad conduct of her kings. Christ is the one perfectly righteous King. This righteousness of Christ is of great significance. 1. It secures and justifies his position. There is no reason to depose him as there was to depose many of the ancient kings. 2. It gives him great claims for honour and

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obedience from his subjects. Such a king deserves loyal service. 3. It gives worth to his sacrifice. Christ is a Priest as well as a King—the Melchisedec of the New Testament. When he intercedes for the world, and so redeems to himself "a people of acquisition" (1 Pet. ii. 9), his righteousness affords weight to his pleading. 4. It makes his example to be of supreme authority. As the righteous King he is the type of what the righteous subject should be. A further inference, drawn by the prophet himself, is worth more extended notice.

II. CHRIST MAINTAINS A RIGHTEOUS GOVERNMENT. Under a personal rule the character of the administration is an exact reflex of the character of the monarch. We see in the history of the Jews how bad conduct in the kings meant iniquitous treatment of the subjects. Christ, the righteous King, will necessarily rule righteously. From this fact certain important consequences flow. 1. Negatively, Christ will abolish the injustice under which many of his people suffer. It may be necessary that the process shall be slow. But it must be accomplished in the golden future. Meanwhile it is a consolation for the wronged to feel that even now they are not unfairly dealt with by their great Master; and surely to the Christian Christ's behaviour should be far more important than anything the world may do. 2. Positively, Christ will maintain the right, and effectually rebuke the wrong within his kingdom; he is a King as well as a Saviour, and a righteous King executing judgment. Mild and gentle, he is yet holy and firm. The Christian who would enjoy the favour of his Master must win his approval by loyal obedience and pure living. Christ is no lax and careless Monarch. It would be ill for his Church if he were so. 3. Christ will lead his people into righteousness. He rules in righteousness, not only to execute justice, but to make his people righteous. This is the highest idea of righteous government. How do we stand in relation to this righteous kingship of Christ? Are we submitting to it for our own improvement and his glory? Are we ignoring, or resisting, or dishonouring it only to bring a judgment from the righteous God upon our heads? Let the careless remember that the Saviour is a King and a Judge.

Ver. 16.—(See on ch. xxiii. 6.)

Vers. 19—26.—*Nature's aids to faith.* We see faith and science flung into conflict. In the Bible they not only harmonize, but science is regarded as a stay to faith, and nature, instead of being treated as a hindrance to faith, is repeatedly called in to strengthen it. As science advances old formulæ are necessarily discarded. But may we not approach the difficulties of our age in the spirit of the Bible, and hope for some large synthesis which shall restore the old relation of science as the handmaid of religion? In the mean time the general correspondences suggested by Jeremiah are as true now as they were in his day.

I. THE PERMANENCE OF NATURE IS AN ASSURANCE OF THE PERMANENCE OF GRACE. The same God rules in the physical and spiritual spheres. In the one he is not capricious and uncertain. Why should we fear his being so in the other? Night, tempest, winter—things dark and wild—do not set aside the eternal ordinances of beneficent nature. The blue sky survives the black cloud that hides it for a season only to reveal it the more clearly after shedding itself in thunder-showers. Why, then, should we think that the heavenly grace of God's love should be less enduring? If the ordinances of nature fail we may expect the same of the covenant of grace, but not till then, since both depend on the same Divine endurance.

II. THE SUCCESSIONS OF NATURE ARE PLEDGES OF THE SUCCESSIONS OF GRACE. Nature is ever changing, though changing according to uniform laws. In spiritual experience we meet with change. Neither of God's kingdoms is a Chinese empire. Progress marks both; and progress means change. But the change, though it alters events, does not alter principles; it only develops them to fuller exercise. Do the changes of life make us fear the loss of God's blessing? Let us remember that the changes in nature do not upset its laws. Our experience varies, but God's love is changeless. He shows this love, however, rather by a succession of blessings than by maintaining present blessings unaltered. So is it in nature—day and night, summer and winter, alternate. To-day's grace will not last for to-morrow; but new grace will be bestowed then if we seek it. The succession does not fail in nature, nor will it in grace.

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III. THE ABUNDANCE OF NATURE IS A PROMISE OF THE ABUNDANCE OF GRACE. We cannot count the stars. Can we count the contents of our own world? of one small section of it? The great and multitudinous variety of nature was a wonder to the ancient Hebrews. How much more wonderful is it to us! There we see no failing of resources, but an infinite abundance, an almost reckless prodigality that sometimes shocks our economic notions, founded as they are on the requirements of limited means, but not applicable to an infinite wealth. Why then should we fear that the fountains of grace that flow from the same God should ever run dry? God administers his grace with a royal bounty. There is enough for all; there is abundance for each.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—(Cf. ch. xxxii. 1—5.)—M.

Vers. 1—3.—*Revelation of God's purpose to him who performs his will.* Jeremiah had resolutely witnessed to the truth, and now he was confined in the king's prison in order to his being silenced. But so far from the Divine communications being less frequent, they were more so, and, if possible, more weighty and important. The word of the Lord came to him the *second* time (ver. 1), and a gracious revelation of God's power and willingness to bless.

I. GOD IS WITH THOSE WHO SUFFER FOR HIS SAKE. It was a token of his love that Jeremiah should receive this assurance, and one which he was most certain to appreciate. Prisoners and martyrs for conscience' sake in all ages of the Church have been similarly consoled. There are special and peculiar consolations for persons so situated. God is nearer then than at other times. His promises are greater and brighter, and his presence more felt. Who would not suffer thus to be thus comforted?

II. GOD REQUESTS US TO ASK OF HIM THE THINGS WE MOST DESIRE. Not that there are not circumstances of such a character as to call forth spontaneous proofs of his favour and love. But seeking and asking are exercises of faith, which cannot long be dispensed with in our intercourse with our heavenly Father, even although "he knoweth what things we have need of before we ask him" (Matt. vi. 8). And this because: 1. *The exercises of the soul in prayer and faith are greater benefits in themselves than most things that are to be procured through them.* 2. *Such exercises are a preparation of the soul for heavenly gifts and communications, and keep it in readiness for them.* 3. *They are pleasing to God, and gratify his love.* The answer is certain, and, indeed, waiting; but he loves to be asked. There is no more endearing position in the sight of God than that of prayer.

III. THOSE WHO FAITHFULLY OBEY GOD'S WILL WILL LEARN SOMETHING OF HIS PURPOSE. Revelations of surpassing magnitude await the prophet in the darkness of his prison-house. He did not hesitate to proclaim God's will, and to submit to the consequences of so doing; he is to receive his reward in further disclosures. And these are of the most gracious and consolatory description. But apart from this, the mere communication of the Divine purpose to him was a sign of favour and honour; his truest satisfaction and peace were to be found in hearing God's voice, and being considered worthy to share the secrets of the Divine future. Man is steward of the present; God retains his hold upon the future, and only discloses it for the reward of faithful men, and for great and merciful ends. 1. *Great* things, in their scope, character, and influences as belonging to salvation. 2. *Secret things* (Authorized Version renders this word "mighty"). Not belonging to ordinary experience, but to God's counsel.—M.

Vers. 15, 16.—(*Vide* on ch. xxiii. 5, 6.)—M.

Vers. 17, 18.—*Perpetuation of the kingly and priestly stock.* I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE OFFICES. To single out these two offices from the others existing within the Jewish nation is to emphasize their importance. They are thereby recognized as the pillars of the theocratic constitution. 1. *The king.* The grandest unit of human society. Evidently no accidental office, but an ordained and significant one. The king, as representative of God, was the supreme authority of the state. As the chosen

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of God, or as legitimately descended from such a one, he ruled by Divine right. He was the centre of patriotic attachment, and the authoritative embodiment and enforcer of Divine righteousness—at least that was the ideal. How few of the princes of the Davidic succession realized this the history of Judah can witness. But it was ever held before the people as a sacred promise that a "king should reign in righteousness." 2. *The priest.* The covenant of priesthood was a covenant of *peace* (Numb. xxv. 12), of *life and peace* (Mal. ii. 5). It was the mediatorial or reconciling element in the constitution—that through which the nation in its individual citizens, and as a whole, was related acceptably with God, and made partaker of his righteousness. The consecration of the priesthood in a mediate sense sanctified the people; and in the continued existence of the priesthood a guarantee was afforded of the favour of God and the permanence of Israel's mission as the righteous servant of God.

II. How the promise was fulfilled. What is actually predicted concerning the Davidic and Levitical succession is that it will never be quite cut off; it will never happen that there is wanting any one in whom the house may be perpetuated. In the Captivity such a gap took place: *Jeconiah was written childless.* But it was never to occur again. Now, how are we to understand this promise? In its literal sense it was only approximately fulfilled; spiritually and figuratively the fulfilment was complete: 1. *In our Lord Jesus Christ.* Of the house of David after the flesh, he is eternal King and Lord of the spiritual Israel. He is also "a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." As the great High Priest of mankind, he appears before God "making continual intercession" (Heb. viii. 3). 2. *Christians, too, realize the ideal here presented.* Through the atoning work of Christ they are made "kings and priests," a "royal priesthood" (1 Pet. ii. 5—8). The identification of the Lord with his servant dignifies and ennobles the latter, making him a new centre of spiritual dominion and of intercessory and reconciling influence. "If we suffer [endure] we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim. ii. 12) is a promise which looks forward to the completion of the Messianic kingdom. The Levitical priesthood, too, is lost and absorbed in the priestly character of Christ and his people.—M.

Vers. 19—22.—*The covenant of God permanent as the laws of nature.* A curious inversion of Gen. viii. 22, but very instructive. There, what is considered by the secular mind as secured by the laws of matter operating mechanically, is declared as a promise, and consequently as dependent upon the good will and gracious purpose of God; here, what appears at first to be within the power of one or both parties to it, is stated to be as absolute and permanent as if it were not a moral engagement but a material law. Accepting, as in vers. 17 and 18, the Messianic as the true fulfilment of this prediction, what do we learn?

I. The intrinsic power of God's Word. The creative fiat was omnipotent; the promise is to be not less so. It is as if a power dwelt within it to bring to pass what it declares. Of course this is not so in the one case any more than in the other. God is in his Word, making it effectual even to its remotest end. We are reminded of Christ's utterance, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away," which seems to make an even stronger assertion. Equally potent is the Word of God in the gospel, its warnings, invitations, and transforming energies.

II. The absolute, eternal significance of the person and work of Christ. The human element in the Divine covenant relation has ever been the variable and uncertain one. But through the unique personality of the God-Man, and of his atoning sacrifice, that element is strengthened and made secure. An incarnation like that of Emmanuel, an act like the death on the cross, once achieved is irreversible, and its consequences must affect the remotest eternity. The spiritual laws comprehended and illustrated in the transactions of the gospel are as irreversible as those of nature; and in the person and work of Christ there is an objective basis presented that can never be destroyed by the weaknesses or unbelief of men, any more than "my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night."

III. The spiritual influence of the new covenant. (Ver. 22.) It is really a creative word, because it calls into existence the Church or community of believers, who are the true successors of the seed of David and the Levitical priesthood. In its constant triumphs and the ever-increasing nature of the Messianic kingdom, fresh

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securities are given for the perpetuation of the kingly and priestly functions as developed through the grace of God in human nature. Where the gospel is faithfully preached, and spiritual life truly energizes, believers will, as at Pentecost, be "added daily" and "multiplied." It is like *leaven*, a *seed*, etc. As appealing to the deepest needs and yearnings of human nature, it is bound to overcome the world and comprehend the whole race within the zone of its influence. "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it" (Isa. lv. 11).—M.

Ver. 3.—*The reasonableness of prayer.* "Call *upon* me, and I will answer thee," etc. This is one of the blessed promises of God given for the help of sorrowful and struggling men. None but God knows how many have been helped by it and by the glorious throng of Divine words which are like unto it, or how often, or how mightily. "Ah! you think so," replies a voice not unfrequently nor too modestly heard in these days. 'Tis the voice of the disciples of science, which says, "Yes; you religious people think God answers your prayers and hears you when you call upon him; but really it is no such thing; it is all a mistake, and, what is more, you ought to know and confess it, and therefore give over what you are pleased to call your prayers. Prayer! how is such a thing possible in a universe governed everywhere by fixed laws as ours is? Where in such an order is there room for what you call 'answers to prayer'? It is scientifically impossible, not to say absurd, and the marvel is that people don't see this." So speak, and some of them with far more of arrogance and scorn than now represented, not a few of the scientists of the day. The calling upon God in the day of trouble is nothing more, so one of the most distinguished of modern philosophers has said, than the piteous cry of the hare when she knows that the hounds are upon her. A bitter cry of distress wrung out from the soul. It is thought by those who utter it to go up to God, and that God will hear it and help; but that is all a vain imagination; it goes out into mere space; nothing does come of it, and nothing can. This is what is said, and it is based upon the observed uniformity and inflexibility of law. All science is built up upon this faith of the unbroken order and regularity of law, and without it there could be no science, and indeed no life at all. The reign of law is everywhere; how then can prayer be reasonable? and where is there room for those Divine interpositions which prayer asks for and thinks it receives? What is the use, then, of the mother weeping her heart out in her prayers that God would give back the health of her beloved child? What the use of national fasts and days of prayer for rain, for removal of pestilence, for restoration of the health of princes, and the like? If these things lie in the order of fixed law, they will come to pass without any prayer; if not, they will not be in spite of all the prayers of all the Churches in all the world. Now, this is what is so loudly and largely being said on all sides. What have we to reply? Has the Christian preacher nought to urge on the other side? We think he has. He has a right to ask the scientists such questions as these—

I. HAS SCIENCE DISCOVERED ALL GOD'S FIXED LAWS? Are you quite sure that nowhere there may be some law which shall provide for these results which Christians call "answers to prayer"? We are bound to be grateful for the magnificent discoveries of the laws of the universe which science has already made. But has it discovered *all* these laws? and if not, why amongst those as yet undiscovered ones may there not be that which the Christian needs to justify his prayer? It is the same argument as John Foster urges against the atheistic doctrine that there is no God! "What ages and lights are requisite for this attainment, the *knowing* that there is no God! This intelligence involves the very attributes of divinity, while a God is denied. For unless this man is omnipresent, unless he is at this moment in every place in the universe, he cannot know but that in some place there may be manifestations of a Deity by which even *he* would be overpowered. . . . Unless he knows all things, that is, precludes another deity by being one himself, he cannot *know* that the Being whose existence he rejects does not exist." Now, in like manner, the Christian may meet the scientific unbeliever by asking him whether he has traced every effect up to its cause. May not, then, the cause you do not know be the one which meets the Christian's need and secures answer to his legitimate prayers?

II. WHAT MORE RIGHT HAS SCIENCE TO REJECT THE FACTS FROM WHICH THE CHRISTIAN

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DEDUCES HIS DOCTRINE THAT GOD ANSWERS PRAYER, THAN THE CHRISTIAN HAS TO REJECT THE FACTS UPON WHICH SCIENCE BASES HER DOCTRINE OF INVARIABLE LAW? Science marshals her facts. They are a goodly array, and drawn from all departments of creation, animate and inanimate; from all kinds of living organisms, whether animal or vegetable; and they have forced upon you, we readily admit, the conviction of the universality and invariability of natural law. Christians are bound to believe you. We are not going to question your facts, though we may some of your inferences from them. Let your facts once be proved to be facts, as so many of them have been, and we will candidly accept them. Yes, though they compel us to set aside some old and cherished interpretations of Scripture, and to confess that we have read our Bibles wrongly in more than one instance. We trust you in your statement of facts; we believe you to be good men and true. Now we turn and ask you to deal with us and our facts in like manner. For we, too, have facts from which we have drawn the conclusion that, let prayer be according to the will of God, he will assuredly answer it. Some of our facts which have much force with us you perhaps would not admit, since you would explain them on the ground of mere coincidence, and we could not prove that, apart from prayer, they could not have been. *E.g.* persons in distress have called upon God; relief has unexpectedly come and in very remarkable ways. The believer looks on such instances as answers to prayer; nothing can persuade him that they are not. Still, it cannot be denied that they *may* have occurred without such prayer. Other such instances are those in which life despaired of has been given back in answer to, or in connection with, fervent prayer for such restoration; as the Prince of Wales's recovery in 1872. Now, this recovery *might* have been—we cannot prove that it could not—apart from prayer, and therefore, whilst these instances are very convincing to the believer, they are not so to others. But there are facts concerning which we can say they are valid for our argument, because they never have occurred and never do occur, apart from prayer. *E.g.* in the coming away of any soul from its attachment to the world to surrender itself in trust and love to Christ—that which is called conversion; was this ever known apart from prayer? Did ever any find the Lord without seeking him—*i.e.* without prayer? Also in the ordinary conduct of the Christian life, who among us is able to keep his garments unspotted from the world, to overcome besetting sin, to confront and conquer temptation, to preserve the hands clean and the heart pure, without continual prayer? Again, who are they that have attained to a high degree of spiritual life and vigour, to whom it is their habit to walk with God; who "rejoice in the Lord always;" who are God's saints indeed, the very elect, about whose being born of God we have no doubt? Now, every one of these will tell you that they owed their all to the habit their Lord enabled them to maintain of constant prayer. Press on in thought to the realms of the blest, move up and down amid the throng of God's redeemed; is there one who has or could have attained that blessedness if on earth he had not sought God in prayer and called on the Name of the Lord? So with any really living Church, a Church that is a power for good, a blessing to the neighbourhood, a Church at peace, at work, and blessed with the prosperity of God, is the life of such a Church ever possible apart from this same power of prayer? Its life is nurtured, not by its wealth, numbers, rank, culture, intellect, eloquence, or any such gifts, but by its prayers. All the rest would let it starve; by prayer alone it lives. One other instance—the winning of our children for God. Does any parent or teacher ever secure this great joy without prayer? Never. Such are our facts; in them we are sure that God answers prayer; and hence we believe also that in the material world he does the same. And as we receive the facts of science, so we ask that our facts may be received likewise.

III. IS NOT GOD OUR FATHER? The scientific hypothesis denies his fatherhood, if not his very existence altogether. If he do exist, he is, according to the scientist, so enclosed in his own laws and in the visible adjustment of things that he has no room for freedom of choice, for exercise of will. Like the mainspring of a watch, he is shut up in his own works, and can only act in one given way. Or, like the locomotives on our railways, he must keep to the rigid appointed iron track, and not swerve therefrom in the least. But that is not our conception of God. We believe him to have a mind, a will, a heart; and hence we conclude that, like the best earthly parents, whilst keeping ever in view the true welfare of his children, he yet allows himself, *within those limits*, freedom of action as may seem to him wisest and best. Now, within these limits there is

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room for prayer and room for answers to prayer. We cannot believe him to be so tied down by his physical laws that, when it is consistent with the highest good of his children, and yet more when it is necessary for that good, he is unable to modify or alter them even though he would. A God so bound by physical law is really no God, and the creed of the atheist will alone harmonize with the assertions of science. If there be a God, he must be a personal God; but if he be a Person, then he must have will, the power of choice; but if he have will, he must be able to modify the action of his laws, as we can and do continually; and if he be our Father, as we believe, then we need not doubt that the fervent believing prayer of his children will avail much to induce him to modify his laws for our good. And hence we maintain that it is good to call upon him, and that he is nigh unto such and will save them. Prayer, then, is not unreasonable if there be a God; not unreasonable if we adopt the very methods of science itself, and deduce our doctrine from our facts; not unreasonable, unless it can be shown that science is aware of and has registered *every* fixed law of God.—C.

Ver. 6.—*The Divine treatment of sin.* "Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them." Here, as in so many other Scriptures, the moral, political, social, and spiritual recovery of Israel is spoken of under the image of bodily healing. For all healings of the body are types and pledges of the better healing. If God so cares for the body, which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the tomb, shall he not care for the soul, which is eternal? This ver. 6 is a promise that the Divine treatment of sin shall be effectual. The Lord is Jehovah-rophi. He heals them that have need of healing.

I. SIN IS AN AWFUL FACT. All nations have recognized this and mourned over it. But it has not been created by Christianity. True, the Christian faith brands it with the stigma of shame as none other does; for everywhere sin has cast its deep shadow and driven noble souls, not a few, to utter despair. But it was here before Christianity. Hence—

II. THE QUESTION OF QUESTIONS HAS BEEN—WHAT IS TO BE DONE WITH IT? And the answers have been very different. Note: 1. *The answer of the philosopher, which extenuates it,* on the ground: (1) Of the imperfection of our nature. If we knew more, it is said, had larger comprehension of truth, we should not sin. But is that true? Is increase of knowledge always increase of virtue? Are little children, who know so little, less virtuous than many an educated man? The names that are accursed for ever, Nero, Herod, Balaam, Philip II. of Spain, Alva, and many more, were all educated men. (2) Of the tyranny of the body. It is this cursed flesh, they say. Get rid of that, and the soul will be pure. Hence one reason wherefore St. Paul's doctrine of the resurrection was so opposed at Corinth, because they thought it was a bringing back of all that dread source of evil which it was hoped was done with for ever when death came. Now, no doubt, the flesh is the occasion of sins not a few. But there are many sins, and those which probably God will most sternly condemn, which are quite independent of the body. Malice, envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness need no "flesh" for their existence. And even in those sins which are especially of the flesh, myriads of victories over it, victories continually renewed, prove that it can, as it ought to, be kept under and brought into subjection. (3) Of its being a form of good. Without it, it is urged, virtue could not be attained; for it is in the conflict with sin that virtue is developed, disciplined, and strengthened. Virtue would lie dormant, lethargic, and be a miserable weakling, were it not that sin roused her up, exasperated her, and forced her to stand on her defence. But such argument confounds temptation with sin. What is urged is true of temptation, but never of sin. Nor is sin needed as the foil, the dark background on which virtue shall shine out with greater lustre than but for this foil had been possible to it. For sin is, some affirm, a necessary condition, almost an ingredient, of good. Moral evil cannot be so evil as it is thought. The devil is not so black as he is painted. But is sin necessary to manifest goodness? Where, then, is such background in God, or in the angels, or in the saints in glory? None, therefore, of these extenuations will stand. Reason, conscience, and God's Word alike condemn them. 2. *There is the answer of despair,* which regards it as inevitable and invincible. This answer does not make light of it, but regards it as that which can neither be helped nor overcome. They believe there is a kingdom of evil, independent of God, with its all but omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient head, like unto God. This was the creed of ancient Persia, against which, that his countrymen might not be carried away by it,

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Isaiah protested with all his might; cf. Isa. xlv. 5—7, "I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me . . . I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things." And Manicheism was a like heresy. And the moral despair which regards sin as inevitable is practical Manicheism. But this is a terrible error; for he who has come to believe in the existence of a god of evil as well as a God of goodness will soon come to believe only in the former and not in the latter at all. Moreover, conscience in her deepest utterances gives no countenance to this invincibility of evil. "Father, I have sinned," is its confession. It never urges that it had no power to resist—that it was forced to sin. It is a dread snare of the devil to persuade men that sin is invincible. Believe him not. Myriads of holy souls give him the lie; and, through the might of Christ your Lord, you may give him the lie likewise. But note now—

III. CHRIST'S ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION. This verse is one of innumerable others which affirm the same truth. 1. *He does not make light of it or extenuate it.* His high and holy teaching, his blameless life, the doom he pronounced on sin, above all, the death he died, were one emphatic protest against and condemnation of sin. But: 2. *He did not regard it as invincible.* He distinctly promises deliverance from it, and: 3. *This he gives.* By blotting out the record of the past. By the present help of his Spirit. By the bright prospect of eternal life. Facts prove all this. He healed them that had need of healing. No disease baffled him. His resources did not run out, and the healing was a real one. *And so it is still.* Let us come to him and see.—C.

Ver. 9.—*Fruits of pardon.* Some of these are declared here; *e.g.*—

I. IN REGARD TO GOD. 1. *Joy.* God, not *Deus impassibilis*—a God who does not feel. 2. *Praise and honour.* The theme of the Church on earth, and especially in heaven, is this, "Unto him that loved us," etc. There is no glory equal to that which shall accrue to God by "Jesus Christ," for through him pardon comes to guilty men.

II. IN REGARD TO THE PARDONED THEMSELVES. They enjoy the goodness and prosperity which God procures them. Pardon is not mere acquittal, but acceptance and adoption, and hence the goodness and prosperity.

III. IN REGARD TO THE WORLD AT LARGE. "They shall fear and tremble." Why this? 1. Because of its *manifestation of power.* His people a feeble flock, but thus raised and exalted. 2. Because of its *exposure of idolatry.* It will be seen how foolish they have been to trust in their false gods. 3. Because of its *manifestation of grace.* The fear and trembling shall not be of dread so much as of repentance—repentance wrought by the evident grace of God in the rich pardon he has bestowed.—C.

Vers. 10—18.—*Paradise lost and regained.* I. THE PICTURE OF A PARADISE LOST. This is given in ver. 10. The land desolate; the flocks and herds all gone; no human being to be seen; the cities laid waste. Now, this meagre outline would recall to the mind of the Jews the blessed days when the land teemed with inhabitants; when the cities were numerous, wealthy, populous, and strong; when the hills and dales of their country-side were covered over with flocks; and when, in the glad prosperity of all, the very fields were said "to shout for joy and also sing" (Ps. lxv.). But all that is past; desolation reigns, the lands stripped, the cities burnt with fire, and the people slain or in exile; the whole land desolate of both man and beast.

II. PARADISE REGAINED. Such is the bright, joyous picture set forth in these verses (11—18). Its elements are: 1. *Righteousness.* Not mere innocence, as in Eden, but virtue tested and triumphant, and so issuing in a settled righteousness. This must be the basis of all truly blessed life. The people must be all righteous. This secured by him who is called "the righteous Branch," "the Lord our Righteousness." 2. *Love.* (See ver. 11.) The joyous picture of the gladness of the bridegroom and the bride. And that companionship which is the most blessed in the world, and that love which is deepest and purest of all, are fitly taken as the symbol of that love which shall constitute the home of God's redeemed more than a paradise regained. 3. *Worship.* (Ver. 11.) The picture of the temple service has risen up before the prophet's mind. He hears the glad chant, the loud response of the people, "Praise the Lord." He sees the altar fire and the priests and sacrifices, and by this representation he teaches us that *worship* is part of the blessedness that is to be. 4. *Healthful and universal employ.*

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(Vers. 12, 13.) It has often been said, "God made the country, man made the town;" and the saying may be read truly or falsely, as each one wills. For he who says there is nought of God in the city speaks as falsely as he who says there is only God in the country. But there can be no doubt that the highest, purest, and most healthful forms of life are connected with the country. "Four words, each of them full of meaning, comprise the conceptions which we attribute to the paradisaical state. They are these *innocence, love, rural life, piety;* and it is towards these conditions of earthly happiness that the human mind reverts, as often as it turns, sickened and disappointed, from the pursuit of whatever else it may have ever laboured to acquire. The innocence we here think of is not virtue recovered, but it is moral perfectness, darkened by no thought or knowledge of the contrary. This paradisaical love is conjugal fondness, free from sensuous taint. This rural life is the constant flow of summer days, spent in garden and field, exempt from our exacted toil. This piety of paradise is the grateful approach of the finite to the Infinite—a correspondence that is neither clouded nor apprehensive of a cloud" (Isaac Taylor). Now, in these verses, when the prophet would set forth the blessed life that the restored people should enjoy, he draws a picture, not of city, but of country life; not of hard exacting toil, but of healthful, peaceful occupation—the pastoral life of a quiet, beautiful land. It is a symbol of all healthful employ, and such employ shall be a further feature in the blessedness that is to be. Therefore, "Sursum corda!" a righteous, loving, worshipful, and healthful life awaits the sons of men "for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them," saith the Lord.—C.

Ver. 11.—*The prophet's refrain.* "For I will cause to return the captivity of the land." This declaration is heard again and again. We have it in substance times without number in this and in previous chapters. We have a similar statement in ch. xxxii. 37. But we have the exact words, the very same form of expression, in ch. xxxii. 44, and in vers. 7 and 26 of this chapter. Hence we have called it the prophet's refrain. And the like theme of God's purposes of grace towards mankind generally should be the refrain of all the prophets of the Lord in these our days. For—

I. THE BLESSINGS ASSURED ARE SIMILAR. In connection with each several repetition of this promise, "I will cause their captivity to return," is named some specific blessing which that return shall bring along with it. In connection with its *first* mention (ch. xxxii. 44) God's purpose is given as the reason wherefore his now afflicted people should again possess their land. And there is a life eternal, a true, real, blessed life for humanity; a life compared with which this life is like the hard lot of the captive Israel compared with the glowing glad life promised in the days when their captivity should return. Then in connection with its *second* mention (ver. 7 of this chapter) there is the promise of "health and cure," moral and spiritual health, when their iniquity should be cleansed and their sin forgiven. And is not the promise of man's redemption like to this? In the eternal life there shall be health and cure indeed. And with the *third* mention of this promise (ver. 11) there is associated gladness and joy. "There shall be . . . the voice of joy and the voice of gladness," etc. (ver. 11). And with the *fourth* there is (ver. 26 of this chapter) the promise of permanence for all that has been before, the permanency as of the covenant of day and night, and the perpetual sovereignty of their own royal house, the seed of David. And so we look for a new order of things, which shall not be as this, troubled and transient, but characterized by a rest and joy that shall be eternal. Thus analogous are the blessings promised to the return of Israel and the redemption of mankind.

II. THE MOTIVES OF SUCH PROCLAMATION OF GOD'S PURPOSES OF GRACE ARE ALIKE. The reason of the prophet's refrain were such as these. 1. *He so delighted in the truth he had to tell.* Often and often he had been charged with a message of a far less welcome kind; but this was blessed to his soul. And so, would we effectually speak of God's purposes of grace, they must be the joy of our soul. We must ourselves delight in them. 2. *He really believed it.* The oft repetition of this word shows his confidence in it. He speaks with no bated breath. "I believed, therefore have I spoken." And this must ever be the spiritual force with which our gospel must be charged if it is to have any effect on those who hear it. 3. *He knew it would so comfort the cast down.* Many already were mourning along with the prophet over the desolations so surely

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coming on the land, and many more when away in exile would mourn. But the prophet knew that their hearts would be cheered and sustained by the earnest and confident assurance that "their captivity should return." For their sake, therefore, he reiterated this word. And in order to our now earnestly proclaiming the message of God's love, we too must believe that it will do the people good, that it will be for their help and comfort. And we must have for them, as the prophet had for his people, a real love and concern. This has ever been an attendant of and is essential to a successful ministry. 4. *He knew that it would so vindicate God.* Questionings and perplexities not a few were being occasioned by the prophet's solemn declarations of the coming destruction. They contrasted his terrible word with the oft-repeated promises made by God "to David and to his seed for ever," and to Zion, concerning which he had said, "There will I dwell, for I have delighted in it." These and the many more like promises seemed for ever to forbid the possibility of that which the prophet, and now the actual course of events, declared to be close at hand. How were the two to be reconciled, and the truth and goodness of God to be vindicated? It was by the truth declared in this refrain of the prophet. That rendered both Divine words harmonious and true. Thus the enemies of the prophet would be silenced, and the company of them that feared God would be reassured. The house of God was dear to the prophet; and so must it be to us would we earnestly preach his Word. "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up;" "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" So was it spoken of or by the Lord Jesus Christ; and so in like manner in our measure and degree must it be true of us if we are to be true witnesses for him and for his grace. The gospel is the vindication of God to-day, as the return of the Captivity was in the days of the prophet. And being jealous for God, he proclaimed incessantly that return, as we must the redemption of mankind.—C.

Ver. 16.—"*The Lord our Righteousness.*" (Cf. homily on ch. xxiii. 6.)—C.

Vers. 17, 18.—*Do the prophets prophesy falsely?* If the statements of these verses be taken literally, it would seem as if they did. The house of Israel never, since its exile, has had a throne at all, nor has any descendant of David been acknowledged as its prince. Yet these verses say, "David shall never want," etc. And, literally, it never can come to pass, for in the lapse and confusion of the ages their genealogical tables have been utterly lost, so that none can certainly say who is of the house of David or who of the house of Levi. The Asmonean princes who occupied the throne of Judah were of the tribe of Levi, and Herod was no Jew at all. Now, the promise of these verses is one that is perpetually repeated (cf. 2 Sam. vii. 16; 1 Kings ii. 4; Ps. lxxxix. 4, 29, 36; Numb. xxv. 12, etc.). How, then, are they to be understood, since events have most surely falsified them if understood in any literal way? And so the Prophet Hosea cheered the ten tribes of Israel—those of whom we speak now as the lost ten tribes—by promises of their restoration, and Jeremiah does the same (cf. Hos. vi. 2; ch. iii. 14, etc.; l. 17—20, etc.). But in spite of all these prophecies, the "ten tribes never were restored, and never, as a whole, received any favour from God after they went into captivity" (Pusey). Now, what shall we say to these things? Shall we say—

I. THE PROPHETS WERE BUT MEN, AND HENCE THEY WERE CERTAIN TO BE WRONG WHEN THEY VENTURED INTO THE DOMAIN OF THE FUTURE? This is the rationalist's reply. He attributes all these utterances to the wish to cheer their countrymen in their sorrow, and perhaps to maintain their own credit. Sanguine enthusiasm will account for all. Is, then, the estimate that our Lord and his apostles and the Church universal held concerning these "holy men of old, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," to be regarded as false? Are the prophets themselves to be convicted as liars, affirming, "Thus saith the Lord," when not the Lord, but only their own poor weak selves were speaking? And are all the manifest fulfilments of prophecy to go for nothing in establishing their authority? The rationalist's reply will not do.

II. THAT THE EXILES DID NOT FULFIL THE CONDITIONS OF THE PROMISED RESTORATION? (Cf. homily on *A never-to-be-forgotten principle of interpretation*, vol. i. p. 451.) But does this principle apply here? No; for the promise of restoration carries along with it the promise of the "new covenant," which included "the new heart"—the

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heart of stone taken away and the heart of flesh given instead. The conditions necessary for the restoration were the subjects of promise as much as the restoration itself. God took the whole matter into his own hand.

III. THAT THE PROPHETS, LIKE THE APOSTLES CONCERNING THE RETURN OF THE LORD, DID NOT KNOW CONCERNING THE RETURN OF THE CAPTIVITY? The apostles do undoubtedly speak of the Lord's return as a thing close at hand, to be looked for in their own day. But such language is to be regarded rather as the language of desire than of knowledge. For the Lord had distinctly told them that it was not for them to know the times and the seasons. Therefore we can only regard their words as those of desire, hope—permitted hope, indeed, but not of Divine assurance. May we do thus with the prophetic word on the return of the Captivity? No; because they so distinctly claim the Divine authority (cf. vers. 25 and 26 of this chapter and *passim*, for what they affirm). The apostles do not; 1 Thess. iv. 15, "By the word of the Lord," is an exception. The Lord's revelation referred only to such as should be alive and remain at his coming, not to that generation then living.

IV. THAT THE PROMISE IS BUT DELAYED? This is loudly maintained by many. They who believe that the Jews will be restored to their native land, expect it on the express ground that Canaan has never been actually and permanently theirs. A certain tract of country, three hundred miles in length by two hundred in breadth, must be given, or else they think the promise has been broken. "If there be nothing yet future for Israel, then the magnificence of the promise has been lost in the poverty of its accomplishment." This reply is not to be lightly dismissed. If the kingdom of God, for whose coming we daily pray, do mean that which all who heard our Lord so perpetually speak about it, understood it to mean—and he never, in the main substance of their belief, even hinted that they were wrong—if it mean *the reign of God upon earth*, as we believe it does, in which, under Christ, the Israel of God, the Church, shall be first in the kingdom of heaven, having been of those blessed ones who had part in "the first resurrection," then the literal fulfilment of the prophetic word may reasonably be looked for. This was "the hope of Israel," of which St. Paul spoke; "the restitution of all things," and "the times of refreshing," of which St. Peter spoke; and this belief has at least this vast advantage, that it enables those who hold it to read the Scriptures literally, and to understand by David, Jerusalem, Levi, Israel, etc., that which they seem to mean, and not whatsoever the too facile process of spiritualizing may say that they mean. Of course, if the kingdom is of this world, this age, as our Lord distinctly told Pilate it was not, then a literal fulfilment of these prophecies is out of the question; but regarded as the kingdom to be revealed in another age, after the resurrection and the Lord's return, then all is as possible as it will be blessed.

V. THAT IT IS FULFILLED ALREADY? This is what they affirm who regard our Lord as embodying in himself both the regal and priestly functions, and the Church as being the nation whom God has restored. The Jew's national life and his religion were the two things most dear to him. These, it is said, have been preserved to him in the Church, and in him who is the Church's Head. But surely these are the exigencies of exegesis, and but *preterœa nihil*.

VI. THAT SUCH PREDICTIONS ARE INSTANCES OF GOD'S LAW OF ILLUSION? (Cf. on this F. Robertson's sermons on the 'Illusions of Life,' vol. iii. p. 83.) We have illusions *in nature*. The sun, etc., seem to move round us whilst we are at rest. The hedges, fields, etc., fly along whilst the train in which we are seems to be stationary. The mirage. We have them in moral and mental life.

> "Hope springs eternal in the human breast,
> Which never is, but always to be, blest."

What pictures we draw in our youth of what life is going to be for us! Then see what life really turns out. We are all subjects of the law of illusion. Now, was it so in these Bible histories? Abraham was promised Canaan. But he never had a foot of it to call his own (cf. Acts vii. 5). All the patriarchs "died in the faith, *not* having received the promises, but were persuaded of them" (cf. Heb. xi.). The early Church was persuaded that "the Lord was at hand;" "the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." And yet he never came, and has not come to this day. Now, may not these predictions

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be further instances of this law of illusion? Ten thousand times "No," exclaim as many people; "it is to make God a liar." Is it so? Of course, then, we would rather not be deceived; we would have all our illusions done away. Would we? As for "Hope," let her be put an end to, seeing what an incurable liar she is. But distinguish between being subject to delusion and illusion. He who is subject to the former hopes for some good thing and gets *nothing*. He who is subject to the latter, hopes for some good thing and, if the illusion be of God's permission, gets something *better*. Our hopes lure us on. We acquire character, habits of patient industry, etc., better far than the mere material thing hoped for. The patriarchs hoped for an earthly Canaan; they won such faith in God that by it they all "obtained a good report." They never complained of God deceiving them (read Heb. xi.); for they knew that, if not the thing they hoped for was given, God had provided that which was better (Heb. xi. 8—10). Our own belief is that, in regard to this world, these promises were illusions, but in regard to the world to come, they shall in substance and reality be fulfilled there. Meanwhile let us all have faith in God, who, in ways better far than we think, will fulfil that which now it sometimes seems as if he never fulfilled at all.—C.

Ver. 6.—*The abundance of peace and truth.* I. THE NEED OF SUCH A REVELATION. There is already abundance of discord, mutual hostility, instability, deceit. What a picture of misery is at once suggested by contrast with the state presented in this promise! Instead of the welcome salutation of peace, there is too often threatening. And when the salutation does come, it is too often only a mere conventional expression, and in some instances even an elaborated hypocrisy put forward to carry on war behind it, and instead of the feeling that one is on a sure foundation, there are continual quakings that disturb what is underneath, and continual blasts that disturb what is above. And beside what attacks man from without, there is within a spirit of hostility and rivalry to others, a spirit striving to shake their position and triumph over them. So that peace and truth need to be revealed within us first of all. We need, not merely to have amicable feelings towards others, freedom from envy and malice, but we need positive cordiality. Loving, unselfish cohesion is the true way to escape bitter habitual contention. Moreover, this peace and truth are needed in abundance. It must be said of them, as is said in the New Testament of God's Spirit, that they are given without measure. The promise of the peace that passeth all understanding is assuredly a promise correspondent to our necessity.

II. THE FACT OF SUCH A REVELATION. Peace is revealed in Jesus Christ. In him there is the secret of a composure and a steadfastness unaffected by all the common causes of discord and instability. He had an unusual number of enemies, and this because he was so persistent in declaring righteousness; and yet all the time he had that peace within which showed how outside forces only affected the mere shell of life. In this life there was ever the joint manifestation of peace and steadfastness, and the steadfastness was explained by the fact that he came from God, continued in God, did the will of God, and so, ever having this hold on the Eternal, and being held by the Eternal, the shaking influences of time did ever more and more both to reveal his strength and their own weakness. All the exhortations of Jesus with respect to faith are meant to reveal to us the abundance of peace and truth. With what pity Jesus must look on the abortive, melancholy attempts of men to trust in the untrustworthy! and yet the unveiled magnificence of peace and truth is unseen. What we have to do is to look desiringly, hopefully, towards God's revelation; for surely the complete revelation includes not only something gracious to be seen, but full insight to see it. The apocalypse to John in Patmos came to one who "was in the Spirit on the Lord's day."—Y.

Vers. 10, 11.—*The mournful stillness of the present, and the gladsome voices of the future.* I. THE PRESENT STILLNESS. What makes it so painful? Not all stillness is painful; indeed, stillness is often very grateful, a thing to be sought, a timely refuge for those who are stunned and confused by the clamours of the world. The stillness of night is pleasant after the noise of day. The stillness of the mountain and the wilderness seems more still when one has come from the city's bustle. There is even something suggestive of escape into everlasting peace when one looks at the stillness of

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death as contrasted with all the power of sound in the previous life. But the stillness here is painful, because it does not come in any normal way; it is stillness where there ought to be sound—sounds of traffic, sounds of friendly intercourse, sounds of children playing, sounds of worship. To come into the individual life, it is the silence of the dumb, the silence of that which was made to speak, intended to speak, and can only be silent because of some inexplicable interference with natural constitution. Dumbness ought not to be, and so the state of things here represented, when in the houses and streets of Jerusalem there was sound neither of man nor beast, was one which ought not to have been. There was no occasion for it in the very constitution of things. It came by man's own bringing of it. The present silence had been preceded by many voices that ought never to have been heard—voices of threatening, voices of greedy demand, voices of revenge, voices of complaint and of indignant appeal against injustice.

II. THE VOICES OF THE FUTURE. The sounds of life are to flow back into the now desolate streets, but they are to be the sounds of a different kind of life. Sounds springing from righteousness within and from a principle of obedience to Jehovah. Sounds that come from a universally satisfied people. Not sounds of joy and gladness in palaces, and sounds of privation and despair in hovels; but sunshine falling everywhere, and everywhere the hearts of the people ready to break forth into song. In the eleventh verse there is first of all the general indication of gladness. Every one is full of healthy life, which, as a matter of course, breaks forth into joyful manifestation. Then, as a very significant illustration, there is the gladness of the bridegroom and the bride. This signifies a stable society, a hopeful prospect, the joys of home life. Probably there was no joy so demonstrative as that connected with wedding festivities. Then the joy of religion comes in to crown and conclude all. Praise to Jehovah for his goodness and his enduring mercy, and offerings of thanksgiving in his house. If joy of this kind had been absent, the other joy would not long have lasted. From what God sends down into our lives as causes of abiding joy, we must send back to him responses of intelligent and heart-felt praise.—Y.

Vers. 12, 13.—*Returning flocks.* In ch. xxxi. there has been mention of planting vineyards, and of God's goodness with respect to the corn, the wine, the oil. But agriculture was only one of the important industries of the land. To have set ploughmen and vine-dressers to work again, and left shepherds unprovided for, would have meant only a partial restoration. God has a remembrance of all classes of the community, and all varieties of the surface of the earth. Shepherds were not to go away into exile without a special promise to comfort them. By "causing the flocks to lie down" we may take to be meant that a sense of security and restfulness will be established; and that "the flocks will pass again under the hands of him that telleth them" suggests their numerousness. There seems to be also a distinct remembrance of the places most appropriate for flocks. Nor must we let slip the spiritual sense of this prophecy when we call to mind the references to pastoral life in the New Testament. It is the power of Christ, the Branch of righteousness growing up unto David, who makes spiritual flocks and spiritual pastors to abound. And instead of the selection from the literal flocks for sacrifices, there is the self-presentation of every one in the spiritual flock as a living sacrifice.—Y.

Ver. 15.—*The righteous Scion of David.* Here is a great leading prediction, which enables *us* to interpret as to the time and mode in which the rest of the glorious predictions connected with it were to be fulfilled. We know full well who this righteous Scion was, and when we look at his work, we can translate all the figurative language into spiritual realities. We no longer go looking for Israel and Jerusalem in any mere local way, and the vineyards and corn-lands and pastures of the restored people of God we understand to be only feeble indications of the spiritual satisfactions coming through Christ. Note—

I. THE ORIGIN OF THIS RIGHTEOUS SCION. He springs from David. According to the flesh, he is connected with a name suggestive of past days of prosperity and glory. David himself is emphatically to be reckoned as a righteous stock. That he fell into grievous backslidings is not to be denied; but we know his aspirations, his sighings and strugglings after conformity with the Law of God.

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II. THE IMPLIED CONTRAST WITH OTHER SCIONS WHO WERE NOT RIGHTEOUS. Scions of unrighteousness had already sprung up, had their day, and done their mischief. Their position made their character and doings peculiarly pernicious. With a disposition to act unjustly and unrighteously, they had power to act over a very large area. So we should ever contrast Christ with the men of large powers who have widely influenced the world, and yet have influenced it for evil, because their powers have been directed by selfishness and error. There can be no doubt that a son of David means here one who will act as a king; and that reminds us how many kings have been tyrants, looking on those under them as merely so much convenient material, by which they might effect their plans. The exiled people, thinking of their restoration, would have to include the thought of king in the complete ideal; and surely this would bring very distinctly before them the evil some of their kings had wrought in the past.

III. THE COMING SCION IN HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS. Righteousness is emphasized as his great quality. It is needed in a king above all things that he should be just. He must not be an Ahab stealing Naboth's vineyard. Being in a fiercer light than other men, he must be unusually careful as to the aspect of his actions. Love is not mentioned here as a quality of this Scion, not because it is not needed, but because righteousness is the great quality that, for the comfort of Jeremiah's auditors, needed to be emphasized. Nevertheless, it is well for us to remember that this Scion of David secures righteousness, because he ever acts from a loving heart.—Y.

Vers. 17, 18.—*King and priest in perpetuity.* The declarations of these verses come by a natural association after the declaration of his advent who is the righteous Scion of David. Kingship and priesthood in perpetuity—that is the general assurance; but what a difference between the assurance looked at from the point of view given by Jeremiah's time and the point of view given by ours! We look back on the achievements of history, and then see how much more a prediction means than anything that could have been supposed possible at the time it was spoken. Observe—

I. THE NEEDFUL PERPETUITY OF THE OFFICES. Kingship and priesthood cannot perish out of God's true Israel. There must always be a king; there must always be a priest. These offices, properly discharged and honoured, are as needful to the prosperity of Israel as fruitful lands and pastures well occupied with flocks. All government has to come at last to some personal authority. That the authority of some single person rests on the choice and acceptance of the many does not make that authority less needful, less real. And so with priesthood. The priestly office is needed, however it may change its forms and channels. Mediation between God and man is a necessity, which more and more unfolds its depths as man reflects more on the possibilities of his being. Even priestcraft, with its marked repugnances to intelligence and liberty, has at least this much good about it, that it is a testimony to man's need of mediation.

II. THE WAY IN WHICH THE PERPETUITY IS MANIFESTED. The king is one; the priest is one. Looking back, we are made to see this clearly. "Of his reign there shall be no end," says Gabriel to Mary. Whatever wisdom, power, and beneficence are in Jesus, are in perpetual exercise. Death, which ends the authority of purely human kings, only enlarged and deepened the authority of Jesus. He not only claims perpetuity for his demands, but we have ample reason now to say that the claim is admitted. And as to priesthood, what more need be said than make a reference to the expositions of the priesthood of Jesus made in the Epistle to the Hebrews? It is the priesthood for ever according to the order of Melchisedec. What an abidingly helpful thought it should be that we look to a Mediator ever active in sympathy with human wants, ever understanding them, knowing them indeed far better than the subjects of them! All the externalities are gone—sacrifices of beasts, furnishings of the holy place, symbolic garments of the priests, symbolic ordinances of service; but the reality remains and must remain in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. The deepest evils of human life, the evils that cause all others, are swept away by the priesthood of Jesus. And so also the greatest goods of human life, those that are seminal and full of energy towards the production of other goods, come through the same priesthood. Compared with the possibilities of the future, the predictions of these verses are, indeed, only at the beginning of their fulfilment.—Y.

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EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

This chapter must be taken in connection with ch. xxxv. The whole section consists of three passages, introduced with a superscription in the same form, but otherwise unrelated. It serves to finish off the earlier prophetic portion of the book, ch. xxxvi. opening a series of narratives.

The first passage (ch. xxxiv. 1—7) is virtually a postscript to ch. xxxii., xxxiii.; it apparently contains the prophecy referred to in ch. xxxii. 3—5 as the cause of Jeremiah's imprisonment. The same prophecy recurs in a shorter form in ch. xxxvii. 17, and, by comparing the context of this passage with ch. xxxii. 1, etc., we are enabled to infer that the original prophecy was uttered at the renewal of the siege of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, who had withdrawn for a time on the news of the approach of Pharaoh's army.

Ver. 1.—**All the kingdoms of the earth**; etc.; rather, *of the land*. The accumulation of phrases is to convey the composite character of the Chaldean army. **And against all the cities thereof**; *i.e.* the fortified cities which still held out—against Lachish and Azekah, if no more (ver. 7).

Vers. 2, 3.—(Comp. these verses with ch. xxxii. 3—5.)

Ver. 4.—**Yet hear the word of the Lord, etc.** Clearly this introduces a limitation of the foregoing threat. Zedekiah will, it is true, be carried to Babylon, but he will not suffer a violent death; he will "die in peace," and be buried with all customary royal honours. A difficulty, however, has been felt in admitting this view. How could Zedekiah be said to die in peace, when he was "in prison till the day of his death" (ch. lii. 11)? and how could the deposed king of a captive people be honoured with a public mourning? The reply is (1) that, as compared with a cruel death by flaying or impalement, it *was* "peace" to live in the obscure quiet of a prison; and (2) that, as the Jews appear to have been left very much to themselves (see Ezekiel, *passim*), it is credible enough that they were allowed to show the customary honours to a deceased representative of David. At any rate, the alternative view seems not in accordance with sound exegesis, viz. that the verse means this, "If thou obey the word of the Lord, and surrender thyself to Nebuchadnezzar, thou shalt live and die in peaceable possession of the throne." What parallel can be produced for this violent interpretation?

Ver. 5.—**With the burnings of thy fathers.** It was customary to burn spices at royal funerals (2 Chron. xvi. 14; xxi. 19). **Saying, Ah lord!** (see on ch. xxii. 18).

The second of the group of prophecies in ch. xxxiv., xxxv. is composed of vers. 8—22. It contains a denunciation of the Jews who, at the beginning of the siege, had emancipated their Hebrew slaves (according to Exod. xxi. 1—4; Deut. xv. 12), but after the withdrawal of the Chaldeans had resumed possession of them. Ver. 21 is couched in a form which indicates the precise date of the prophecy, viz. before the Chaldeans returned to renew the siege of Jerusalem.

Ver. 8.—**A covenant.** The scene of this "covenant" was the temple (vers. 15, 18). Solemn agreements of this kind were not uncommon (comp. 2 Chron. xv. 12; 2 Kings xi. 17; xxiii. 3; Neh. x.). **To proclaim liberty unto them.** The phrase, a very peculiar one, is taken from the law of jubilee (Lev. xxv. 10), though the prescription on which the covenant was based refers exclusively to the seventh year of the slave's servitude.

Ver. 9.—**Should serve himself of them**; literally, *should work through them*; i.e. "should employ them for forced labour;" as in ch. xxv. 13.

Ver. 10.—**Now when all the princes, etc.** This verse should rather be rendered thus: *Then all the princes, and all the people*, etc., *obeyed, every one letting his slave, and every one his handmaid, go free, not serving themselves of them any more; they even obeyed, and let them go.*

Ver. 13.—**Out of the house of bondmen.** Egypt had been a "house of bondmen" to their fathers (Exod. xiii. 3; Deut. vi. 12, and elsewhere); let them not make the holy city thus grievous to those who were equally with themselves children of Jehovah's redeemed ones.

Ver. 14.—**At the end of seven years**, etc. This is the literal rendering, but the sense, as is clear from the parallel passage in Deut. xv. 12, and indeed from the next clause of this very verse, is "in the seventh (*not*, the eighth) year."

Ver. 15.—**Ye were now turned**; or, *ye returned* (the primary meaning is simply "to turn;" hence (1) to turn away, as in ver. 16; (2) to return, as here; comp. ch. viii. 4).

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Ver. 17.—**I proclaim a liberty for you.** Judah is henceforth to be "lord of himself—that heritage of woe;" or rather, he is to become the slave of Sword, Pestilence, and Famine. The "liberty" now proclaimed does not profit Judah, who so much desires it. **I will make you to be removed**; rather, *I will make you a shuddering* (as ch. xv. 4).

Ver. 18.—**When they cut the calf in twain,** etc. This clause should be translated differently, and placed, for clearness, in a parenthesis (*the calf which they cut in twain, and between the parts of which they passed*). The division of the calf might, in fact, be called in Hebrew either "the covenant" or "the token of the covenant" (comp. Gen. xvii. 10, 11). It was a solemn assurance that he who should transgress God's Law should share the same fate as the victim. The same idea seems to have dictated the Hebrew phrase, "to *cut* a covenant," and the Greek and Latin equivalents (ὅρκια τέμνειν: *fœdus icere*); comp. the parallel narrative in Gen. xv. 10.

Ver. 20.—**And their dead bodies,** etc. One of Jeremiah's repetitions (see ch. vii. 33).

Ver. 21.—**And Zedekiah . . . and his princes.** Graf infers from the separate mention of the king and his princes that these had themselves been unfaithful to the covenant. But the threat in this verse seems merely intended to enforce the preceding one by specializing the most prominent sufferers. Parallel passage: ch. xxi. 7. **Which are gone up from you** (see ch. xxxvii. 5).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*A king's doom.* Jeremiah reveals to King Zedekiah his approaching doom. The invader is already occupying the land and coming up before the walls of Jerusalem (ver. 7). It is now too late to escape, resistance is vain, the doom is certain. What a terrible scene is that in the royal palace when the mournful prophet stands up to deliver his message to the terror-stricken monarch! Such events are rare in history. Yet the general truths on which the message of Jeremiah depended are eternal and clear to all who will see them. We have no prophet to tell us of the exact nature and date of our future judgments. But we know the principles of God's government and can apply them to ourselves. We know that God is just and must punish sin; we know that "the wages of sin is death." Therefore, though no voice sounds in our ears, the sentence is virtually pronounced every day we sin, and hangs over us continually until our sin is forgiven.

I. THE DOOM. 1. *The city is to be destroyed.* She has shared the king's sin, therefore she must share his punishment. The destruction of Jerusalem was especially a blow to Zedekiah. They who have most can lose most. Jerusalem was a favoured city—the greater, therefore, was the guilt of her apostasy, and the heavier must be her doom. Past favours are no charms against future judgments. 2. *The king shall not escape.* (Ver. 3.) Rank is no safeguard against the judgment of Heaven. God will call kings to account. So all who have accepted responsible posts will have to answer for their conduct in them. Zedekiah would find his sufferings aggravated by being a witness to the triumph of Nebuchadnezzar. Shame, remorse, mental anguish, are to the sensitive worse penalties than bodily torture.

II. THE MITIGATION. The doom is not utter. "In wrath God remembers mercy." God never delights to punish, never gives one blow more than is absolutely necessary; does not hate, but pities and grieves for the victim. So Zedekiah's life is to be spared, and he is to receive a measure of honour in his captivity. There are degrees of punishment in the Divine execution of justice—some will be beaten with few stripes, some with many (Luke xii. 47, 48). In this fact we may see the hope of mercy to the penitent, for God does not wholly cast a soul off. The shadows fall thick, but the darkness is not that of midnight. When trouble comes we are too ready to complain if we do not fall into despair. We should look for mitigating circumstances, those rifts in the clouds that tell of the mercy not yet wholly gone, and give hopes of light after the storm is over. But it is foolish for any to take spiritual comfort to himself for the future life in such thoughts as these, for we may well fear that the lightest doom then will be unspeakably terrible. The refuge we are to seek is not in that poor mitigation, but in the full forgiveness and perfect salvation of Christ now offered to the worst men, even to those over whom hangs the heaviest threat of doom (Heb. vii. 25).

Vers. 8—11.—*Superficial repentance.* In liberating their slaves under the influence

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of terror, and reclaiming them when the cause of alarm had disappeared, the Jews afford a striking instance of superficial repentance. This must be distinguished from an insincere repentance referred to in an earlier prophecy (ch. iii. 10). That is nothing but a hollow mockery from the first, a mere pretence of conscious hypocrisy; but this is genuine so far as it goes—only it goes but a very little way.

I. THE CAUSE OF SUPERFICIAL REPENTANCE IS FEAR OF PAINFUL CONSEQUENCES. When the invader was at their gates Zedekiah and his people were so terrified that they were willing to do and promise anything that would mitigate the wrath of God who had permitted the calamity to visit them for their sins. Fear was the sole motive of their hasty covenant of emancipation. Now, this may be a useful initiative of a thorough repentance; but then it must lead to deeper feelings of hearty detestation of sin on its own account. Fear of penalties, without any abhorrence of the moral evil that merits them can only produce superficial results. Earnest repentance involves a turning from sin rather than a flight from its penalties. Hence the importance of seeking to lead men to repentance through influencing the conscience, rather than by means of mere appeals to selfish terror. Thus St. Paul reasoned with Felix "of righteousness and temperance" as well as of "judgment to come" (Acts xxiv. 25). Lurid pictures of the horrors of hell may work upon the feelings of people with visible effect, but if these take the place of the far more difficult rousing of the moral sense, the effect of them will be very superficial and not all spiritual. Such a sensational style of preaching is tempting because it is easy, and apparently very effective, but its fruits are disappointing, and come short of the less pretentious efforts that aim at awakening the conscience.

II. THE CHARACTERISTIC OF SUPERFICIAL REPENTANCE IS CHANGE OF CONDUCT WITHOUT CHANGE OF HEART. That was no genuine reformation which Zedekiah hurried through in the face of imminent danger. True, the slaves were freed and the Law was obeyed. But there was no indication of a revived respect for the Law, nor of a lessening of greed and cruelty, nor of a larger recognition of the rights of fellow-citizens. There was no change of heart, in fact. Such is the result of a repentance of fear without conviction of conscience. This reformation is worthless in the sight of God, who looks at the disposition of the heart.

III. THE EFFECT OF SUPERFICIAL REPENTANCE IS A TEMPORARY REFORMATION. As soon as Nebuchadnezzar withdrew his army, the Jews renounced their covenant and took back their slaves. The motive for the change was gone, and with it the change ceased. A repentance of terror is not likely to outlive the terror. The fears of the night are forgotten in the thoughtless confidence of the day. This is strikingly illustrated in the vacillation of Pharaoh—willing to let the Hebrews go while a plague was raging, but withdrawing his promise as soon as it was stayed. Therefore this superficial repentance is practically worthless. Nothing can be solid and enduring in life that does not spring from personal conviction and true feeling. We need a real desire to turn from sin, and a determination to seek a better life for its own sake, in order to secure a lasting change. For this we must seek Divine grace, in order that we may be "born from above."

Ver. 17.—*Liberal punishment for illiberal conduct.* The Jews will not set free their enslaved fellow-citizens; God therefore liberates sword, pestilence, and famine upon them. If they are illiberal in their conduct, God will not be stinted in his punishment of them.

I. THE EVILS OF LIFE ARE UNDER THE RESTRAINT OF GOD. They appear to be uncontrolled, but they are really God's slaves. He holds in the hounds of retribution with his leash. They would fain tear their victim. But they vent their rage in vain till their Master lets them loose. Men can only be tormented by Satan when they are delivered over to Satan (1 Cor. v. 5).

II. OUR CONDUCT DETERMINES OUR FATE. The terrible doom is no chance accident, nor is it a cruel act of despotism. It depends upon our behaviour whether or no God will liberate the powers of evil to do their fell work upon us.

III. ILLIBERAL CONDUCT WILL LEAD TO PERSONAL LOSS. The mean man overreaches himself. "There is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty" (Prov. xi. 24). History has proved that slavery is a commercial failure. Slave labour

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is most expensive. But beyond this it may bring upon itself justly earned calamities. Slavery was the curse of the ancient world—the scene of its blackest iniquity, and the root of its direst misery. Few things are more terrible in the history of Rome than the social wars rising out of slavery. The persistent clinging to slavery by the Southern States of America caused the evils of war to be set free amongst them.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 8—22.—*False obedience.* An incident of the siege of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans. At the first alarm the liberation of the Hebrew slaves was declared and solemnly ratified, according to the sabbatic law, which had long sunk into desuetude. The aim of this was a purely military one, viz. the advantage to be derived from the services of the freedmen in the army, and the removal of disabilities that might occasion disaffection within the walls. Yet an appearance of religion was given to it by the form it was made to assume as connected with the Law, and the solemn rites which were observed. That it was really only a time-serving expedient was shown by the restoration of the state of slavery directly it appeared as if the Chaldeans were going to desist from their purpose.

I. WHEREIN IT DIFFERS FROM TRUE OBEDIENCE. This will consist in the essence of the action, which, being moral, must have to do with *motives*. The form of the action was religious, but the real aim of it was one of selfish policy. Good people and bad are frequently found doing the same good and proper actions, but events frequently prove that they have acted from the most opposite motives. It was not to glorify God or to benefit the bondmen that the edict was put forth, but simply to advance their own interests and to "serve themselves" in a more effective way of their brethren. When righteousness is immediately and evidently advantageous, there are many who will become formally righteous; and when religion is fashionable, there are many who will be religious. When misdeeds are rectified it is so far a good thing; but that the reform may be real and permanent it must proceed from true repentance, and an earnest desire to serve God and the interests of our fellow-men.

II. CONSIDERATIONS DETERMINING THE REAL NATURE OF REPUTED OBEDIENCE. In discovering the true character of reputed obedience it is well to study: 1. *The circumstances.* Here there were immediate pressure and distress, the existence of a dangerous element in the state, and the possibility of advantages from the military service of the freedmen. The greatest care is requisite in judging of the professions of persons in straitened or perilous circumstances, and to whom religion presents pecuniary, social, or other advantages. The existence of such circumstances affords a presumption against the genuineness of their conversion; and yet it is not of itself conclusive. A better criterion is to be found in: 2. *Subsequent conduct.* The speedy consignment of the freedmen back again to a state of slavery showed that the observance of the Law was unreal. Actions are ever more eloquent than words. So, when ardent and apparently enthusiastic professions rapidly cool down, and give place to calculating and selfish conduct, we see that the religious movement *has had no deep root* or *has been unreal from its commencement.* Death-bed repentances are proverbially doubtful, because of the impossibility in most cases of applying this test; nevertheless we are justified in believing that in some cases these are genuine. Prisoners frequently belie their declarations when set at liberty. The subject of false repentance may deceive himself, the emotion being genuine, but the nature not being radically changed. Hence the necessity of insisting upon continued obedience from all who are under the influence of conviction, or who appear to be so.

III. THE PECULIAR OFFENSIVENESS OF FALSE OBEDIENCE. It is not a simple act of transgression, but complex and supremely self-conscious. As on this occasion the Jews were manifoldly sinful in (1) their breach of faith with God and their fellow-countrymen; (2) in the dishonour they showed to God by lightly regarding the most solemn oath and ordinance; and (3) in the hypocrisy by which the whole proceeding was characterized; so the false saint is a sinner of the deepest dye. Nor is he at liberty to confine his transgression within definite and foreseen limits; once committed to the false attitude, a repetition and intricate complexity of sin is inevitable. It is, therefore, often a culminating sin.

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IV. THE PUNISHMENT OF FALSE OBEDIENCE. (Vers. 17—22.) The penalty inflicted is very terrible and thorough; as if there were no hope for such men to be spiritually renewed again. 1. *Exemplary.* A curious and instructive parallelism between their crime and its punishment is to be observed: "Behold, I proclaim a liberty for you," and "Their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth." This is in harmony with the didactic and symbolical character of the old dispensation. 2. *Thorough and unmitigated.* No word of hope or compassion is uttered. An end is to be made of such transgressions. 3. *An element of scorn and contempt is discoverable.* There is a terrible irony in the words, "I proclaim a liberty for you," etc., which reveal the depth and absoluteness of their curse. The gospel dispensation, as it offers greater privileges and blessings to the truly penitent, is also accompanied with more awful penalties (Heb. iv. 11, 12; vi. 4—8; x. 29; Prov. i. 26).—M.

Vers. 1—7.—*The Lord, the prophet, and the king.* It is a sad scene that these verses bring before us.

I. THE LORD SEEKING TO SAVE THE LOST. This was the intent of the prophet's being charged with his message to King Zedekiah. If it were possible to save him, the Lord would do so, and, therefore, sent his servant again and yet again. Not lightly will the Lord let any evil-doer go his own way.

II. THE PROPHET FAITHFULLY DISCHARGING A TERRIBLE DUTY. It was terrible every way. 1. *In itself.* To have to be the bearer of such evil tidings, and to one unprepared and unwilling to give heed to them. How much pleasanter to prophesy smooth things than these evil ones! 2. *To his influence as a prophet.* Men would desire to disbelieve him, and at length would—as they had done—persuade themselves that they might do so. A whole atmosphere of unbelief and dislike would surround him and shut up men's ears and hearts against him. 3. *To his personal safety.* Of course nothing but enmity was to be expected from such messages as these, and the prophet reaped the harvest to the full. They sought his life again and again, and wrought him all the ill they could (cf. subsequent chapters). And yet the prophet of God faithfully went through with his commission. Here is the test of fidelity, not in speaking that which men expect of you and will praise you for, but in speaking, when needful, that which men hate to hear. Can *we* lay claim to aught of such fidelity as this?

III. THE KING INFATUATED BY EVIL COUNSELS. There is reason to believe that, left to himself, he would have hearkened to the prophet. But those around him persuaded him to disregard all that the prophet said. Hence this opportunity of salvation for himself and for his people was put away. For had he obeyed, the threatening would not have been carried out (cf. ch. xviii. 8—12). But his heart was hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. In face of that, no fidelity, no evidence, no earnestness of appeal, no pleading, no voice of conscience, could prevail. He was joined to his idols. Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of man is set in him steadfastly to do evil. Pray that from all such hardness of heart and contempt of God's Word and commandment, the Lord would deliver us.—C.

Ver. 2.—*The woe of weakness.* "Zedekiah, King of Judah." The life of this unhappy monarch is a piteous but powerful illustration of the misery of instability of character, the sorrows that dog the footsteps of the infirm will. What men need, in order to be happier and better than they are, is not more knowledge of what is right—they are amply supplied with that; or the presence of plentiful good purpose and desire to do the right—hell itself is paved with good intentions; but what is needed is strength of will, firmness and stability of character. It is for lack of that that men go so wrong and make such a miserable confusion of their own life and that of others. The history of Zedekiah illustrates all this. Therefore note—

I. HIS CHARACTER AS SHOWN BY HIS HISTORY. He was son of the good King Josiah, and may have been one of the "princes" carried off to Babylon in the days of Jehoiakim. He appears to have attracted the favourable notice of Nebuchadnezzar, probably on the ground of the hope that Jeremiah the prophet cherished concerning him. That hope was expressed in the name given him—Zedekiah, "the Lord our Righteousness," a name fulfilled only in One, but telling of the hopes that gathered round this young king. At

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twenty-one years of age he was placed on the throne of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, and then the extreme difficulties of his position became evident. In his own country and in those adjoining, a smouldering rebellion prevailed. This the great enemy of Babylon, Egypt, did not fail to fan and further to the utmost of her power. Only a leader was wanting, and the rebellion would at once break forth. The chief of Zedekiah's own people were eager for him to head the revolt. For a time he refused, and seems (cf. ch. li. 59) to have taken a solemn oath of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar. But keeping this oath was not easy. It was a cruel position for him, and he had not the strength which so critical a time and emergency demanded. The influence of Jeremiah and his fear of the Babylonian power drew him one way; the clamour of his princes, priests, and people, and the promised aid of Egypt drew him another. And so at length he yielded, and treated his oath as so many idle words. Loud and stern were the protests of the prophet of God against such shameless and senseless falsehood (cf. Ezek. xvii. 14; ch. xxviii.). But the princes of his court, as he himself pathetically admits (ch. xxxviii.), had him completely under their influence: "Against them," he complains, "it is not the king that can do anything." He was thus driven to disregard the counsels of the prophet, which, as the event proved, were perfectly sound; and "he who might have kept the fragments of the kingdom together, and maintained for some generations longer the worship of Jehovah, brought its final ruin on his country, destruction on the temple, death to his family, and a cruel torment and a miserable captivity on himself." And there are other recorded instances of his lack of moral strength. His allowing the rich men and all those who, contrary to the Law, had held their brethren as bondslaves, to enslave them once more, notwithstanding that in the most solemn way they had covenanted with God not to do so; then his treatment of the Prophet Jeremiah,—all showed, not so much that he was wicked, as that he was weak. Cruelly imprisoned by his enemies, the king sent for the prophet and placed him in gentler captivity in the court of his own palace. But there assailed by the angry accusations of the prophet's foes, the king yielded, and let them cast him into a horrible pit, where, had he been long left, he must have miserably perished. Conscience, stirred up by the remonstrance of a faithful servant, led the king to interpose again for his relief, and to have him remitted to his prison in the king's court. There Zedekiah treated him kindly; when the famine was raging in the city, he procured bread for him; he asked his prayers, and held long and frequent converse with him, but was all the while in abject fear lest the nobles should discover what their conversation had been about, and he prevailed upon the prophet to condescend to an evasion of the truth in order not to betray him, poor weak king that he was (ch. xxxviii.). Altogether wise was the counsel the prophet gave, but the king would and he would not. He did not know his own mind. But events moved on. The city was captured. The king and his household endeavoured to escape, were caught, carried before Nebuchadnezzar; his children were crucified in his presence; then his eyes were put out; and, loaded with fetters, he was dragged across the weary desert to Babylon, where he lived in misery until the Lord visited him (ch. xxxii. 5)—that is, until the Lord mercifully sent death to put an end to all his woe. It is a pitiful story, but one that teaches much concerning this instability of character which was this poor monarch's ruin.

II. WHAT THIS HISTORY SUGGESTS AS TO SUCH CHARACTER. It suggests: 1. *Its nature.* That it is a halting perpetually between two opinions—a condition of perpetual indecision! You never know where to find such men, or can be sure as to what they will do. They promise so well; they turn out so ill. Like a chip on a stream, driven, tossed, turned hither and thither, entangled, engulfed at last—so is such a man. In secular matters it is ruin, in spiritual it is more disastrous still. 2. *Its results.* What a miserable man this Zedekiah must have been! And so are all such. The debtor's pillow is proverbially a restless one, because of its wretchedness. Yet more so is that of the man who has no will of his own. And what sorrow he brings upon others! He drags them down into the same vortex in which he is himself swallowed up. What ruin is wrought by such men in all the circles to which they belong! 3. *Its cause.* Want of a guiding principle in life. Without this, having no fixed rules, secular life is ruined. But in things spiritual this endeavour to serve God and mammon, this divided heart, is absolutely fatal. In such men the surrender to Christ has never been thorough and complete. They are as the seed on the stony ground. 4. *Its cure.* Living

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under the abiding realization of the presence of Christ. In armies that have begun to waver, the approach, the word, the eye of their leader has rallied them again and won them victory. So if, when tempted to waver, we feel the eye of Christ on us, *we* shall be firm. Therefore let him be the Lord of your souls.—C.

Vers. 8—22.—*Playing fast and loose with God.* See the history. Under fear occasioned by the prophet's earnest appeals and the obvious fact that the judgment of God was drawing near—for the Chaldeans were at the gates—the king and his people solemnly vow to release their slaves. They had no right to retain them; they were sinning against God and them in so doing. Hence they let them go. But the fear departs, they think their danger has disappeared, and they enslave their brethren again. It was an abominable wickedness, and the prophet denounces awful doom upon them for it. Now, concerning such playing fast and loose with God, note that—

I. THIS IS A VERY FREQUENT SIN. Illustrations are Pharaoh, Balaam, Israel's whole career. And there are many such instances now. All insincere repentances are such. They may be: 1. *Very general.* This was so. All the people joined, high and low. Like the professed repentance of the people at John's baptism. 2. *Very solemnly entered upon.* How deeply moved these people seemed! What vows they uttered! 3. *And some fruits meet for repentance may be produced.* These people did for a while set free their slaves. There was a real reformation for the time. The evil spirit went out of the man. 4. *But yet it is all worthless,* for the evil spirit returns, and with increased power. The repentance was so short-lived that it was as if it had never been. Yea, worse: "The last end of that man was worse than the first."

II. ITS ORIGIN AND CAUSE ARE THE UNCHANGED HEART. Underneath the superficial soil there is, in spite of all the seeming repentance, the hard layer of rock. The motive was not the conviction of sin wrought by the Holy Spirit, but a craven fear and a desire, therefore, to buy off God's anger. And in this case it was a cheap way, for liberating their slaves was the best means of securing a strong addition to the forces by which they would defend their city and themselves. Hence, when danger ceased, as they thought, their repentance ceased along with it. What need we all have to be on our guard against the semblances of real religion which our evil hearts are so prone to take up with! And what need to pray that the Lord would show us if we be now self-deceived, and that he would perfectly renew our hearts within us!

III. ITS GUILT IS VERY GREAT. What an outrage it is to God! We would not bear the like conduct from our fellow-men. What awful presumption it manifests! what hardness of heart! And its guilt is the more aggravated because such conduct so plainly shows that we clearly know and understand God's will, though we only make pretence of obeying it.

IV. ITS DOOM IS VERY TERRIBLE. See the burning words of the prophet here (vers. 17—22). And we have portents of that future doom in the hardening of the heart, the searing of the conscience, the being "given over to a reprobate mind," the audacity in wickedness which such conduct produces. How hard to bring such men to repentance! or, if conviction of sin do come, into what depths of despair does it plunge the sinner! All these are indications of the holy displeasure of God which rests on such sin. May he keep us from it.—C.

Ver. 17.—*Slavery.* "Ye have not hearkened unto me," etc. The Jews had become shamefully guilty of this sin of enslaving their brethren. They who had once been slaves themselves, but redeemed by God; they whose whole Law was a protest against it in its real forms of permanence and cruelty; they who were on no higher level than those they enslaved, all being on the same equality with God, members of the same race, worshippers of the same God;—the slavery they were now practising was abhorrent indeed. Concerning slavery—the permanent and absolute possession of a fellow-man, to buy and sell and do with him as he please—this is ever a great sin.

I. NATURE CONDEMNS IT. 1. *We have a moral nature,* a conscience, and this plainly condemns the degradation of a human being to a mere chattel. 2. *Think of ourselves as slaves,* and then how prompt we are to condemn. But if one man may be so held, then every man may. 3. *All are on an equality before God,* and have equal rights and responsibilities. 4. And chiefly because *man is made in the image of God.* Dare we

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make a chattel of him who bears the image and superscription of Deity? At once our heart condemns.

II. THE WORD OF GOD CONDEMNS IT. 1. Not by *direct prohibition*. Enough is known in the circumstances of the ages of the Bible to show abundant reason wherefore the servants of God were not commissioned to go and everywhere denounce this practice. 2. Nor by *the absence of examples* of good men who kept slaves. It was the universal practice. 3. Nor by *absence of implied sanctions* of this relationship. These facts have been urged in its favour, but we may urge: (1) That if everything not distinctly prohibited in the Bible be right, then many very wrong things would be justified. For very few detailed rules for definite acts are given, but principles from which the mind of God may be easily inferred and his Law applied to all the minutiæ of daily life. (2) Paul no more sanctioned slavery than he did the vilest despotism, for if he told slaves to obey their masters, he bade all men be subject to the higher powers. Now, Nero was on the throne at that time. What the Word of God and experience alike teach is that the violent subversion of evil almost always inflicts greater evil than it removes. (3) And the sacred writers had faith in the sure, even if silent, spread of the great principles of Christ which taught "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." (4) And as to the Old Testament slavery and the Mosaic laws in regard to it, it is to be noted that it was a far milder and more genial thing than aught that modern times have known; and next, that the laws of Moses were given on this matter "for the hardness of men's hearts," so that, as with the law of divorce, what could not wisely be at once put down should be so limited and controlled as to be divested of its greater evils. But no greater slander or falsehood can be maintained than to say that the Bible upholds slavery. Its tone and teaching and its universal influence have been to put an end everywhere to the accursed thing.

III. EXPERIENCE CONDEMNS IT. Its influence on the slave, on the master, on the nation, the Church; its moral, domestic, political influence,—all are disastrous and deadly. It is the prolific parent of the worst vices—selfishness, cruelty, licentiousness, tyranny. It has sealed the doom of all nations that have adhered to it, and must ever do so; whilst justice and freedom have ever had resting on them the manifest blessing of God. Christ came to preach liberty to the captives; his gospel is the Magna Charta of the human race.—C.

Vers. 8—22.—*A right act done in a wrong spirit.* I. CONSIDER THE ACT ITSELF. It was emphatically a right act in itself. It did not become right or necessary merely by becoming a covenanted thing. It was an act that meant the attainment of liberty to a very considerable number of people who were not their own masters. God is always on the side of liberty, for only to the free individual is full opportunity given of serving God. And yet this must be said with qualification. External liberty is only of use when it is accompanied with deliverance from inward bondage. Hence, in the New Testament, no great stress is laid upon civil liberty; that would come in due time, and, irresistibly, by the growth and conquering power of Christian principle. The stress in the New Testament is on the maintenance by the individual of liberty within himself. But in ancient Israel there was a God-governed nation as well as God-governed individuals, and civil liberty had to be sought as far as possible by Divine provisions and commands.

II. THE CAUSE OF THE LIBERATION, SO FAR AS IT WAS ACCOMPLISHED. There is some obscurity as to the origin of the covenant and act. Some unmentioned motive seems to have combined king and people to resolve on the liberation of all slaves; but it could only have been a motive of fear and worldly prudence. The same sort of forces must have been in operation as we observe in Pharaoh. A plague drags him a little in the direction of letting Israel go; then the plague ceases, and he draws back again. External force, then, or a shallow repentance, or perhaps something of both, led the people into making this covenant. It was not a deep pity for the oppressed that moved them. The covenant did not come from a deep and perfect insight into the golden rule. Thus there is a revelation of the moral attainments of the people. It is already shown to us how little the better they were for all their opportunities of knowing God's Law and will.

III. THE RESULT OF A RIGHT ACT DONE IN A WRONG SPIRIT. The result is just what

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might have been expected. Inconvenience, awkwardness, daily, almost hourly, irritation, must have come at once. Just try to estimate some of the results. Only when the slaves had become free would the masters understand how dependent they had been upon them. The work of the covenant was not done when the slave was liberated. Really, it was only begun. The master had then to set to work for himself. His former servant is now given opportunity to become his rival. Moreover, the liberated slave himself does not all at once get the spirit of a free man. When things have been going wrong for generations, they cannot be got right by some magical swiftness. Hence, many potent considerations tempted the masters in forcing a return to the former state of things. They had not counted the cost in beginning, and thus, it seems, they were able to take only a very few steps in the right course.

IV. THE PUNISHMENT. This is specially attached to the breaking of the covenant. The people had really no excuse to offer for breaking it, save the inconvenience and the temporal loss occasioned by keeping it. As far as we can see, this particular covenant was a voluntary one on their part. It recognized a law that had been made in the very coming out from the land of bondage, and it was a covenant to perform a certain outward act. The punishment was just enough; the real wonder would have been if something of the kind had failed to fall on those breaking such a covenant.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXXV.

The third member of this group of short prophecies. In it, Jeremiah points to the faithful obedience of the Rechabites, as putting to shame the infidelity of Judahites. It belongs obviously to the time before the arrival of Nebuchadnezzar, perhaps to the summer of B.C. 606. (See Dr. Plumptre's poem, "The House of the Rechabites," part ii., in 'Lazarus and other Poems.')

Ver. 2.—**The house of the Rechabites** ("house" equivalent to "family"). From a notice in 1 Chron. ii. 55 it appears that the Rechabites were a subdivision of the Kenites, the nomad tribe so closely connected with the Israelites (Judg. i. 16; iv. 18—22; comp. Numb. x. 29), especially with the tribe of Judah (1 Sam. xxvii. 10; xxx. 29). The names of Jonadab and of Jaazaniah and his progenitors (which include the sacred Name), together with the zeal of Jonadab for the worship of Jehovah (2 Kings x. 15, 23), seem to indicate that the religion of the Rechabites approximated closely to that of the Israelites. There seem, in fact, to have been two branches of the Kenites—one having Edomitish, the other Israelitish, affinities. Records of the former still exist in the Sinaitic inscriptions, and in the Arabian histories; indeed, there is still a tribe called Benu-l-Qain (often contracted into Belqein) in the Belqâ (the ancient land of Ammon); and it would seem that there is an Arab tribe in Arabia Petræa, eastward of Kerak, which traces itself to Heber the Kenite, and goes by the name of Yehûd Chebr, though it now denies any connection with Jews. There were also Jews of Khaibar, near Mecca, who played an important part in the early history of Islam (see further 'Zeitschr. der deutschen morgenländ. Gesellschaft,' viii. 706; xiv. 438; xxviii. 568, 571). **Into one of the chambers.** There were many "chambers" of different sizes attached to the temple, and employed partly for stores, partly for councils and assemblies, partly for guard-chambers, and other official purposes (comp. 1 Chron. xxviii. 12; Ezek. xl. 17). In ch. xxxvi. 10 we even find a private person occupying one of the "chambers." That into which Jeremiah conducted the Rechabites was, no doubt, one of the largest size; it was appropriated to the use of a single priestly family—the "sons of Hanan" (ver. 4).

Ver. 4.—**A man of God.** The title, according to Hebrew usage, belongs to Hanan, not to his father, and means "prophet" (see *e.g.* 1 Kings xii. 22); comp. Plumptre—

"There the chamber stands
Where Hanan's followers gather up the words
Their master speaks."

The chamber of the princes; *i.e.* the room "where the princes," *i.e.* the most distinguished laymen, especially the "elders of the people," assembled before the temple services. **Maaseiah the son of Shallum.** Probably the father of Zephaniah, "the second [or, 'deputy'] priest" (ch. lii. 24), himself a functionary of high rank, as he is called a **keeper of the door** (or rather, *threshold*). There were three of these "keepers," corresponding to the number of the gates of the temple, and they ranked immediately after the high priest and his deputy (ch. lii. 24); comp. "I had rather be

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a doorkeeper," etc., in one of the Korahite psalms (lxxxiv. 10).

Ver. 5.—**Pots full of wine**; rather, *bowls*, large round vessels (*crateres*), out of which the drinking-cups were filled.

Ver. 6.—**Jonadab the son of Rechab our father.** Jonadab (the contemporary of King Jehu) is here called the "father" of the Rechabites (comp. vers. 14, 16), in the same sense in which the disciples of the prophets are called the "sons of the prophets;" he was a teacher, if not (in some sense) a prophet. This illustrates the uncompromising zeal of Jonadab in 2 Kings x. 23; the religion of Baal was probably at the opposite pole in the matter of luxury to that of Jehovah as practised by Jonadab.

"Not for you the life
Of sloth and ease within the city's gates,
Where idol-feasts are held, and incense smokes
To Baalim and Ashtaroth; where man
Loses his manhood, and the scoffers sit
Perverting judgment, selfish, soft, impure."
(Plumptre.)

Ye shall drink no wine, etc. The Rechabites were, in fact, typical Arabs. The Wahhabee movement, in our own century, may be taken as partly parallel, though, of course, a settled life is not one of the abominations of the neo-orthodox Islam. A still more complete parallel is given by Diodorus Siculus (xix. 94), who states it to be the law of the Nabatæans, "neither to sow corn, nor to plant any fruit-bearing herb, nor to drink wine, nor to prepare houses," and gives as the motive of this the preservation of their independence.

Ver. 11.—**And for fear of the army of the Syrians.** We are expressly told in 2 Kings xxiv. 2 that, after the rebellion of Jehoiakim, "bands of Syrians" made incursions into Judah.

Ver. 12.—**Then came the word of the Lord**, etc. The substance of the severe address which follows must have been delivered in one of the outer courts of the temple, when Jeremiah had left the Rechabites.

Ver. 16.—**Because**, etc. This rendering is against Hebrew usage, and any reader will see that the obedience of the Rechabites stands in no inner connection with the sentence pronounced upon Judah. Ver. 16 is rather an emphatic recapitulation of what has preceded. It runs literally, (*I say*) *that the sons of Jonadab have performed*, etc., *but (that) this people hath not hearkened unto me*; or, in more English phraseology, "Yea, the sons of Jonadab," etc.

Vers. 18, 19.—**A promise to the Rechabites** (perhaps removed from its original connection). The form of the promise is remarkable; it runs, **Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever.** The phrase is, as Dr. Plumptre remarks, "all but essentially liturgical. It is used of the Levites (Deut. x. 8; xviii. 5, 7), of the worship of the patriarchs (Gen. xix. 27), of the priests (1 Kings viii. 11; 2 Chron. xxix. 11; Neh. vii. 65), of prophets (1 Kings xviii. 15), of priests and Levites together (Ps. cxxxiv. 1; cxxxv. 2)." It is, however, rash, perhaps, to maintain, with the same acute scholar, that the Rechabites were adopted into the tribe of Levi. The phrase may be simply chosen to indicate the singular favour with which Jehovah regarded the Rechabites—a favour only to be compared to that accorded to his most honoured servants among the Israelites—the patriarchs, the priests, and the prophets.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—11.—*The Rechabites.* A curious interest attaches to these singular people, whose relation to the settled life of the Jews may be compared to that of the gipsies in modern Europe. They were nomads in the midst of cities, preserving the habits of the desert among all the scenes of civilization. But they were in some respects strikingly superior to their more civilized neighbours—a people whose simplicity and abstemiousness was a living rebuke to the debased luxury of the times. Three leading characteristics of the Rechabites are worthy of special note.

I. THEIR NOMADIC HABITS. It is refreshing to meet these quiet, simple people after wearying ourselves with sickening sights of the vice and hypocrisy of the court and city life of Jerusalem. We are inclined to think too much of external civilization. Making allowance for exaggerations and eccentricities, we may find some much-needed lessons in the protest of Mr. Ruskin against the industrial ideal of the age. Inventions, commerce, wealth,—these are but means to an end. What is the use of the working of wonderful machinery if the outcome is poor and profitless? Many a man's business is a Frankenstein which becomes a tyrant to him. By others the science and resources of the age are only used as ministers to selfish pleasures. Thus the men and women may be none the better for all the advance that is made in the material appliances of the most complex civilization. Yet the personal condition of these men and women, and

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not that of the machinery of life, is the one matter of final importance. The quieter, simpler life of the Rechabites had many points which it would be instructive for us to consider. It was out of all the rush and worry of town life. It was calm and comparatively free from care. With few wants, the Rechabites had few anxieties. Are we so much better off than they in this respect? Then, as a wandering life, it was a reminder of the truth, so often forgotten to our serious harm, that all men who live a life higher than the earthly must be pilgrims and strangers here, and must "seek" a better country, that is, a "heavenly." The man of the world is rooted to the earth; and is there not a danger lest many of us should be so absorbed in the busy pursuits of the world as to neglect greater interests, or so satisfied with earthly possessions as to forget that this is not our rest?

II. THEIR ABSTEMIOUSNESS. These Rechabites were the prototypes of the modern teetotalers. They were no ascetics. They made no pretence to the peculiar holiness of the "self-imposed worship" of "dealing hardly with the body" (Col. ii. 23). On the contrary, they were probably a cheerful and unpretentious people, finding more human happiness in a simple abstemious life than the citizens of Jerusalem could ever discover in the unwholesome luxuries of a corrupt civilization. They teach a lesson which our age greatly needs. We may differ as to the necessity or desirability of total abstinence from wine and such things. But all of us should feel the terrible danger that comes from the enervating influence of luxury. In the present day we see little of "plain living and high thinking." Life is both eager and materialistic. It would be well if we could deny ourselves more, that there should be less grossness about our habits, dragging us down from the calm heights of spirituality.

III. THEIR CHANGELESSNESS. The Rechabites are like the Arabs of the desert who were contemporaries of the Pharaohs, and who live now just as they lived in the days of Abraham. Where shall we find such staunch conservatives? Now, of course, we Western Christians believe in a principle of progress, and rightly set ourselves to realize it. But in the pursuit we may lose something that the Rechabites retained. Mere change is not progress, and a restless love of change endangers the fruitfulness of measures which take time to ripen. On the other hand, there is a true loyalty to the past, a just fidelity to our forefathers. At all events, it is grand to see a people independent of passing fashions, bold to resist the spirit of the age when they think that wrong for them, and firm in their own convictions and determinations. Such conduct is bracing to witness; unhappily it is not common.

Vers. 11—17.—*Filial obedience.* The filial obedience of the Rechabites is here adduced as a rebuke to the people of Israel for their disobedience to their Father in heaven.

I. WE OWE A DUTY OF FILIAL OBEDIENCE TO GOD. Obligation corresponds to privilege; peculiar relationship involves peculiar duties. If God is our Father, we owe special obedience to God on account of our relationship with him. The doctrine of the fatherhood of God is no excuse for the relaxation of the fidelity which we felt to be obligatory so long as he was regarded only as our supreme Ruler. Instead of making us more careless, this doctrine should increase the assiduity of our devotion. Strict religionists who dread the moral effects of the modern broad enunciation of this great truth, and lax self-indulgent people who fancy it will allow them to defy the Law of God at pleasure, both fall into a grievous mistake. The father has rights over his children possessed by no one else, and they owe obedience to him as to no other person. This was recognized and carried out much further in the ancient world than it is among us. 1. It is based on nature; the child naturally belongs to the parent. 2. It is increased by experience. For years the child is wholly dependent on his parents. Helpless, and needing constant attention, he finds in them sustenance, protection, and happiness. Parental anxiety, labour, and sacrifice should bind the children by ties of deepest gratitude. Repayment is impossible, nor is it expected; but the least that can be done is to offer obedience. 3. It is recognized by law. The old Roman law gave the father absolute power over the life of his child. Modern law, though it interferes more with the relations of the family, sanctions wide parental rights. Now, if God is our Father, similar obligations bind us to filial obedience to him over and above the obligation we may feel to his Law, his holiness, and his supremacy (Mal. i. 6).

II. THE NEGLECT OF FILIAL OBEDIENCE TO GOD IS REBUKED BY THE NEGLECT OF

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FILIAL OBEDIENCE TO MEN. The Rechabites were a rebuke to the Israelites. Yet the Israelites had less excuse for disobeying their heavenly Father than the Rechabites would have had for neglecting the ordinances of their ancestor. Matthew Henry clearly indicates the points of contrast somewhat as follows. I give his thoughts with abridgment:—1. The Rechabites were obedient to one who was but a man; but the Jews were disobedient to an infinite and eternal God. 2. Jonadab was long since dead, and could neither take cognizance of their disobedience nor give correction for it; but God lives for ever to see how his laws are observed, and to punish disobedience. 3. The Rechabites were never put in mind of their obligations to their father; but God often sent his prophets to his people, "rising early and speaking," etc. 4. Jonadab never did that for his seed which God had done for his people; he left them a charge, but left them no estate to bear the charge; but God had given his people a good land, etc. 5. God did not tie up his people to so much hardship as Jonadab required of his descendants; and yet Jonadab's orders were obeyed, and God's were not.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—6.—*Temptation by Divine command.* I. SO FAR AS IT WENT IT WAS REAL. The scene and the circumstances of authority and religious sanction given to the invitation were calculated to influence the mind. The "pots full of wine" were also an appeal to the eye. God has tried his servants often, but with no intention of making them fall. He tried Job, Abraham, David, etc. He often does this by his providence, the withholding of his grace, etc.

II. IT WAS DONE WITH THE CERTAINTY THAT THE TEMPTATION WOULD BE RESISTED. The same wisdom that devised the incident knew what would be its issue. We are assured of God that he tempteth no man (Jas. i. 13), and that he will not suffer men to be tempted beyond their ability to resist (1 Cor. x. 13). Yet God is continually testing and trying his people, that they may discover their own weaknesses and apply to him for succour.

III. A GREAT END WAS TO BE SERVED. The scene is dramatic and carefully arranged, that it may be publicly impressive. The lesson to be learnt on this occasion is not that of temperance, but simply of filial obedience in one of its most singular and emphatic illustrations. To Israel the lesson was a comparative one. They were put to shame by the steadfastness of men who had no such exalted Person to obey in the matter of their peculiar customs, but who yet had unswervingly adhered to it. Israel, with all the reasons for a similar fidelity, had been weak and fickle, and finally apostate. Men are tried, not only for their own sakes, but for the sake of others. The patience of the saints is a potent reason for our patience and obedience. Christ himself is the Example and Inspiration for all mankind. He was faithful when he was tempted by circumstances infinitely more trying than any that can assail us; and his power is at our disposal when we ask for it.—M.

Vers. 6—10.—*The filial obedience of the Rechabites.* There is something very remarkable in this simple history. Originally aliens in race (1 Chron. ii. 55), they gained a place in the land of Israel (Judg. i. 16). Jonadab the son of Rechab, the ancestor of the race, was the true founder of the family. His character was so high that Jehu affected his company in order to gain esteem from the people (2 Kings x. 15, 16). From him their ascetic rule of life was received, and they had continued to observe it with unswerving strictness. We have here an illustration of—

I. AN EXAGGERATED VIRTUE. 1. *Their asceticism was a real virtue.* In its various elements of temperance, simplicity, and hardihood, it presents a most exemplary and attractive aspect. It must have tended to holiness and happiness. It would be well for the men of our own day were they to imitate this race in these respects. Most of our social evils are easily traceable to the influence of intemperance, luxury, etc. It was a noble ideal nobly realized; yet: 2. *It was exaggerated beyond natural limits.* This is the penalty of those who rigidly observe one mode of life. Excellent as that may be at the first, and, as a whole, may still continue to be, it gets out of joint with the advancing customs of the age, isolates its votaries from the general current of the

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national life, and stereotypes the degree of civilization or barbarism which gave it birth. In its rigid observance it leads to anachronisms, inconveniences, etc. Its accidental features become more noticeable than its essential ones. Unless grounded on sufficient reasons and continually referred to these, unless adapted in its accidental features to the changing circumstances of the world,—it tends to become unreal, and to produce unreal moral distinctions. There is something of weakness to be detected in the explanation of their presence in Jerusalem (ver. 11). They were out of place. 3. *The secret of this was that it was founded upon an exaggerated sentiment.* Asceticism is in itself neither good nor bad. It receives its real moral importance from the motives and aims that underlie it. In this instance the motive was excellent so far as it was legitimate, but it was clothed with a factitious sacredness and obligation. Consistently carried out, such a principle would stay all progress and sanction the most horrible crimes. That their ancestor had enjoined their mode of life was hardly a sufficient reason for it, and the motive of policy with which he had commanded it was not an exalted one. The true justification for a peculiar mode of life, especially when of this trying description, must be found in the great human and spiritual aims which religion —especially in its later evangelical phase—presents for our achievement. To guard the weakness of a brother, to further the moral and religious welfare of men, and to glorify God by holiness and unselfishness of conduct, are aims that may be ours if we will.

II. A MAGNIFIED PERSONAL INFLUENCE. The hold this man obtained over the conduct of his descendants through so many generations was most remarkable. A man of marked character, great reputation for sanctity, wisdom, and power of impressing others with his peculiar views, forms a conception of what life ought to be, especially for those who, like his own family, are strangers living on sufferance in the midst of another people. The Eastern feeling of respect for parents and reverence for ancestors and of the sacredness of tradition and custom associates itself with his teaching and example, and soon his rule of life becomes a fixed, ineradicable principle amongst his descendants far more potent than any law of the statute-book. This shows: 1. *The power of personal influence.* "Influence is the best kind of power." It belongs more or less to all of us; and we shall be held responsible for its legitimate increase and direction. The influence of any one of us is probably both greater and less than he suspects. It is a natural and proper instinct for man to seek this moral power, and the relations of life afford many opportunities for acquiring and exercising it. Parents. 2. *The importance of securing that our influence shall be of the right kind.* Ultimate results and effects must be left to God; but we have to do with our own character and aims, and with the known tendency of the means at our disposal. We should seek that our influence should be of the very highest kind. It is better to discover moral principles and communicate spiritual inspirations than merely to initiate a custom. Jonadab's influence was on the whole very salutary, but it was not of the highest kind, because he did not furnish his imitators with a morally sufficient motive. So fixed and mechanical, indeed, had their obedience become that they appeared to have more regard to his precept than for the direct command of God (ver. 5). In this respect Jesus Christ is immeasurably his superior. His precepts are self-evident, and commended by his own personal example. He did not appeal to mere self-preservation, but to the noblest moral instincts and principles of our nature. We are not coerced by the personality of Jesus, but persuaded by the sweet reasonableness of his doctrine and Spirit. Influence like this may be slower in making its way, but in the end it is sure to be more lasting and universal.—M.

Vers. 18, 19.—*The blessing of the Rechabites.* I. WHAT IT INCLUDED. It is very startling to find that their blessing is precisely that which is pronounced upon the spiritual Israel of the future. There are two factors in the blessing. 1. *Continuity of the family.* 2. *Perpetuation of its religious standing and moral character:* "To *stand before me* for ever." It is said that descendants of the Rechabites have been discovered in Youcan, and that they still observe the strict *regimen* of their forefathers.

II. WHY IT WAS BESTOWED. The reason given is simple enough, viz. their filial obedience; but it hardly seems to account for the character of the blessing. It is manifest that the bestowal of such a blessing is not to be taken as implying that their conduct had attained to the highest moral standard. But it is significant that the fifth

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commandment, enjoining this very duty, should be the first with promise. Why is emphasis laid upon filial obedience in the Old and New Testaments? Is it not because *the sentiment of filial affection and respect is a necessary antecedent and preparative for the love of God, which is the supreme and universal law of life?* Of the latter it is the shadow and type. Secondary occasions for the solemn utterance of the blessing on this occasion were probably found in (1) the fact that their conduct had furnished a signal reproof of the apostasy of the nation from its true, eternal Father; (2) that *they acted up to the light which they had;* and (3) that the principle of filial obedience, and the habits of temperance which in their case it had enjoined, were thereby more powerfully commended to the observance of men.—M.

Vers. 5, 6.—*Fathers of temperance.* "Intertwined with the history of Israel is that of a wild and independent tribe of Kenites. When the western Israelites abandoned the roving Arab life to settle in the cities of Canaan, the Kenites still retained their pastoral habits. One of the characteristics which we trace in their history was a fierce resentment against oppression and idolatry. It was a Kenite woman, Jael, who smote Sisera, even in her own tent. It was a Kenite sheik, Jonadab, the son of Rechab, who washed his fierce hands in the blood of Baal's worshippers and Ahab's house (1 Kings xvi.)." The free and eager air of the desert had passed into their lives, and they loved it dearly, and determined never to abandon it, especially when they saw the ruin wrought by the oppression and luxury which were overspreading the inhabitants of the cities they knew most of. Hence the Rechabite vow. But the triumphant march of the vast squadrons of Nebuchadnezzar swept the deserts as well as the cities which lay in his way. And for the time even the hardy Kenites were compelled to set up their tents within the walls of Jerusalem. To them God sent Jeremiah, that he might test and behold and then declare their fidelity to their ancient vow. Amid a population given to excess and gluttony, their total abstinence from wine and their temperate habits could not but excite attention, as much as the strange sight of their black tents pitched in the open spaces and squares of the city. Intimation was given to Jeremiah to teach from their obedience a lesson on the disobedience of the people amid whom they were sojourning. "Inviting these rude and faithful Bedouins into a chamber of the temple, he gave them the invitation which the revellers of Jerusalem would only have been too eager to accept, 'Drink ye wine.' But the Rechabites were not to be tempted. They had adopted their law of temperance at the bidding of a mighty ancestor, as a protection against the temptation of cities. They continued it because conscience approved and health rewarded a noble choice. Broken once—even to please a prophet of the Lord—it might be broken again, and soon the glory of their race would have fled. Therefore they at once replied, plainly, even bluntly, 'We will drink no wine; for,' etc." Now, learn from this—

I. GOD SANCTIONS THE TEMPERANCE VOW. (Cf. ver. 18.) How many and manifold are these sanctions! By the rewards of obedience thereto; by the doom which follows disobedience to the laws of temperance; by his providence and his Spirit speaking within; by the laws of health, of thrift, of social well-being, of conscience; by sanctions negative and positive alike; by the example of some of the foremost and best of men, and by his Word;—by all, he witnesses in favour of the temperance vow.

II. AND THERE IS SORE NEED FOR IT. "If I were to tell you," says one, "that there is in the British Isles a being into whose treasuries are annually poured in unproductive consumption more than one hundred and forty millions of our national wealth; whose actions crush year by year more victims than have been crushed for centuries together by the car of Juggernaut; whose unchecked power causes year by year horrors incomparably more multitudinous than those which the carnage of any battle-fields can present; if I were to say that the services wrought by this being were, if any at all, which is an open question, yet almost valueless in kind, infinitesimal in extent, while, on the other hand, the direct admitted indisputable miseries he inflicts were terrible in virulence and vast in ramification; if I were to say that at his right hand and at his left, as eager and ever active ministers, stood Idiocy and Pauperism, Degradation and Brutality; and at that point you were all to rise up at once and cry aloud, 'Tell us the name of this being, that we may drive him with execration from the midst of us, and that every one of us may strive to extirpate his power and expel his polluting footsteps from our

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soil;' and if I were to say that, far from doing this, we all as a nation, and nearly all of us as individuals, crown him with garlands, honour him with social customs, introduce him into gladdest gatherings, sing songs in his glory, build myriads of temples to his service, familiarize our very children with his fame and praise;—were I to say this, then sentence by sentence, clause by clause, word by word, it would be literally true, not of a man, but of a thing, and that thing *intoxicating drink*."

III. How MAY WE FURTHER THE TEMPERANCE CAUSE? Certainly there is no help equal to that of taking this vow ourselves. If, wherever we are, we will touch not, taste not, handle not, on the ground that we regard it as the curse of this land, that entire abstinence will speak more eloquently than aught beside. And besides this, train your children as Jonadab trained his; command them, saying, "Ye shall drink no wine." A generation so trained, what a difference they would make on the side of temperance and all that is good! Never allow a sneer at those who have taken the temperance vow. Strike at the aids and abettors of intemperance, such as badly drained, ill-lighted, comfortless, unventilated houses; lack of means of reasonable recreation and amusement; want of education and leisure, etc. Never treat drunkenness, however grotesque and absurd its forms, as a thing to be laughed at. We never really hate that at which we laugh. And let each one be sure that he does something in this great cause, that he comes "to the help of the Lord against the mighty."—C.

Ver. 14.—*The children put to shame by the stranger.* The men of Judah were the children, inmates of God's house, members especially of his family. These Rechabites, a wandering tribe of the desert, were the stranger. But their fidelity to the command laid upon them by their ancestor Jonadab is contrasted with and rebukes the shameful disregard of the laws of God, of which the men of Judah were so guilty. For near three hundred years the Rechabites had, out of regard for their father's ordinance, adhered to their self-denying customs, and were adhering to them still, whilst God's own people had set at nought all his counsel and would none of his Law.

I. OBSERVE THIS CONTRAST. 1. *In the motives for obedience which existed on either side.* The one was an earthly father, the other Divine; the one man, the other God. The one, long dead, and whose right to control the actions of his descendants had therefore lapsed; the other, the ever-living God, whose right is as eternal as himself. The one had given an arbitrary command against which much might have been urged; the other had given commands which reason, conscience, and experience alike consented to as wise and good. 2. *In the nature of the obedience rendered.* The one was full of self-denial—a hard, stern law; the other contemplated life in a land flowing with milk and honey, and its ways were ways of pleasantness, and all its paths peace. 3. *In the results of obedience.* In the one, obedience had kept together a small, hardy tribe of half-barbarian herdsmen, without home, friends, religion, wealth, or any marked earthly good. In the other, obedience had been crowned with every blessing, so that all men confessed, "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord." And yet, notwithstanding the service of the Lord was every way better, that service was disregarded by his people, whilst the ill-requited obedience to a long-deceased ancestor had been so faithfully maintained.

II. AND SUCH CONTRAST STILL EXISTS. Look at the obedience rendered to the laws of the Korân by the followers of Mahomet; to the laws of honour, of trade, of human masters; everywhere we may see human law obeyed, whilst Divine are set at nought. The world can command the prompt, implicit obedience of her votaries; but God calls, and no man answers.

III. EXPLAIN SUCH CONTRASTS. It is because to those who faithfully obey human laws the transient and inferior are as if they were eternal and supreme, whilst to those who profess to be bound by Divine laws the eternal and supreme are as if they were transient and inferior.

IV. WHAT DO SUCH FACTS SAY TO US? Seek the purged vision, that we may clearly see the relative values of things, that our estimates may be corrected, and so we may come to regard as "first" the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and "all other things" as secondary thereto.—C.

Ver. 15.—(Cf. homily on *The Divine long-suffering worn out*, vol. i. p. 204.)—C.

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Vers. 18, 19.—*Rewards of filial piety.* We have an instance here. Literally, the promise annexed to the commandment, "Honour thy father," etc., was fulfilled; for their "days were long in the land which the Lord their God gave them." Now—

I. THERE ARE SUCH REWARDS. 1. Promised in God's Word (cf. *passim*). 2. Visible in happy home life. 3. Perpetuated in prosperous communities, nations, etc. 4. Sanctioned by the laws of nature, of man, and of God.

II. THEY ARE THE PRODUCTS AND PROOFS OF THE LOVE OF GOD TO MAN. Hence: 1. The heart of the parent is filled with love to his children. 2. This love leads to desire earnestly the child's well-being. 3. To secure this, God has given (1) a responsive love in the heart of the child towards its parent; (2) the instinct of trust; (3) the direct sanctions of his Word, his Spirit, his providence, to strengthen and maintain that filial piety which so ministers to the good of all.

III. THE GREAT EXEMPLAR OF SUCH PIETY. Our Lord Jesus Christ. "I do always," he said, "those things which please my Father." As God is the realization of perfect fatherhood, so is the Lord Jesus Christ the embodiment of perfect sonship. That sonship was tested and tried as no human sonship ever can be, and it never failed, even under the pressure of the agony, the cross, the seeming abandonment. In him, therefore, we see our Model, and in his exaltation now our reward.—C.

Vers. 1—11.—*The power of a father's command.* The Rechabite habit is, of course, brought forward here to contrast obedience to an earthly and arbitrary demand with the disobedience of Israel to heavenly and essentially righteous laws. But it is worth while to look into this Rechabite habit altogether, in its origin, its causes, its results, its power.

I. THE ORIGIN OF THIS HABIT. The only information we have here is that the habit originated in a command of Jonadab. But, of course, Jonadab must have had some reason seeming weighty to him; and on looking at 2 Kings x. we can make a shrewd guess as to the ends he had in view. He sees the sanguinary and extirpating zeal of Jehu against the scions of Ahab and the worshippers of Baal, and is it not fair to presume that he wished to guard his kinsfolk and posterity against falling into idolatry such as would involve a like terrible fate? Then it occurs to him that he can best do this by separating his people from the dwellers in Israel. This can best be done by urging on them to live a wandering and pastoral life; and still again, the tent life is to be secured by separating the Rechabites from the Israelites in their pleasures. The Rechabite has his plain rule of conduct: "I drink no wine." "Very well," says the indulgent, idolatrous Israelite, "I care not for your company." Idolatry was always connected with debauchery, sensuality, and indulgence of animal passions, and to all these things wine might come to be a minister. Unquestionably Jonadab was a shrewd man, and something of what he aimed at he seems to have gained.

II. THE TEST OF THIS HABIT. No doubt the habit had often been tested, and presumably the same answer would ever be given: "Our father has commanded us to drink no wine." Was it a sufficient reason, one may ask? To which it may be replied that, generally speaking, a father's command would not be enough. We must always ask—What is the thing commanded? Here the question is simply one of positive precept. No one could say that drinking wine was a moral duty, or that the Rechabites injured any one by refusing to drink it. And, indeed, they might have enlarged on the advantages that had come to them through their strict compliance with Jonadab's command. But, in doing so, they entered on debatable ground, and might have been forced into argument. They did the best thing in their position—they fell back on a simple, unreasoning assertion of ancestral custom. Notice, too, *the circumstances in which this habit was tested.* They are divinely prepared circumstances. It is not a band of revellers in the house of feasting who ask them to drink wine. God commands it to be put before them in the house of the Lord, and in the chamber of a man of God. God wishes his people to see for themselves the power of a paternal request; for never before surely had the reasons seemed so great for departing from the rule.

III. THE DISADVANTAGES OF THIS HABIT. The habit did secure what Jonadab meant it to secure. The Rechabites had been kept apart from Israel. But now notice that an advantage gained from some purely external practice is very likely to have some accompanying disadvantage. The Rechabites become tent-dwellers, and then, on the approach of the Chaldeans, having no continuing city, no place of defence, they flee

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to Jerusalem. After all, the principle of Rechabitism, the principle of separation and isolation, has its limits. If we would fairly claim the advantages of human society in times of peril, we must not play the hermit and ascetic at other times. To be in the world and yet not of it, that is both the problem and the possibility.—Y.

Vers. 12—17.—*Rechabites unconsciously reproving Israelites.* I. HOW FAR THE MEN OF JUDAH WERE REALLY CONDEMNED; *i.e.* How far were the cases really parallel? The first question to be asked is—Were the men of Judah as able to obey the commandments of Jehovah as the Rechabites were to obey the precept of Jonadab? and, of course, the answer is that for many reasons they were not. But passing this over for the present, let us notice the one respect in which Israelites were *lamentably different* from Rechabites. The Rechabites gloried in their attachment to the precept of their ancestor; it was a sort of point of honour with them; whereas the Israelites were in no way grieved, humiliated, or ashamed because of their disobedience. If only it had been a continual and sore trouble of heart that there was not in them strength to obey God, why, this very trouble would have been a measure of obedience. But they both disobeyed and disobeyed in the most heedless and audacious way. Instead of receiving prophets with contrition and as messengers of God, they laughed them to scorn, abused them, and even put them to death. And similarly the Rechabites reprove us. In the midst of all our natural inability to give a true obedience to Divine requirements, we should be incessantly troubled by this; then would the way be made open for revealing to us how obedience becomes possible.

II. HOW FAR THE RECHABITES WERE REALLY PRAISED. After all, Rechabite and Israelite were really the same sort of beings. If they had exchanged places, they would have exchanged conduct. The Israelite was quite capable of sticking, with utmost tenacity, to some external rule. And the Rechabite, we may be quite sure, was equally incapable, with the Israelite, of obeying the commandments of God. But the Rechabite was to be praised in this that he recognized an authority outside of his own wishes. The law under which he lived might not go very far; but it operated with certainty so far as it did go. The Rechabite would have died rather than violate the ancestral prohibition. God ever recognizes conformity to law as a good thing. We must, therefore, not go seeking in these Rechabites more than God has appointed us to find. The one good thing in them was singled out to point a most humiliating lesson and vindicate the need of a severe chastisement. Compared with the benefits of Jehovah toward Israel, what had Jonadab done for the Rechabites?—Y.

Vers. 18, 19.—*God's recognition of the Rechabite obedience.* This is just in accordance with what we might expect. The Rechabites, when they have been used to put Israel to shame, are not allowed to go away without a sufficient stamp on their noble conduct. The Divine estimate of that conduct is sufficiently shown by the words Jeremiah is authorized to speak.

I. GOD WILL ALWAYS RECOGNIZE A SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE. Here we lay emphasis, not so much on actual obedience, as on a *spirit* of obedience. As to actual obedience, there may be dispute of claim and conflict as to authorities. But the spirit of obedience is one running through the whole of life. And God must have seen the spirit of obedience very strong in these Rechabites. Perhaps it is not too much to say that, if they had been in the place of Israel, it would have been a sore grief to them that they were not able properly to obey the commandments of Jehovah. Their obedience was tried, it must be remembered, not in the ordinary associations of life, but in extraordinary and difficult circumstances. They showed the stuff that martyrs are made of, and if God specially recognized their obedience in what was only a matter of external conduct, how sure we may be that he will recognize all obedience that goes deeper! The thing he would have us do is to find out the right Master, right Teacher, right Leader, and then follow him to the death.

II. THE PARTICULAR PROMISE WHICH GOD MAKES HERE. Very likely, in a certain sense, it was literally fulfilled. We must take "for ever" in the limited meaning so often found in the Scriptures, and then we shall have no difficulty in believing that the Rechabites for many generations had a special providence surrounding them. But recollecting the spiritual significance of prophecy, we may take "for ever" in its largest

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sense. The essence of the promise is not fulfilled to sons of Jonadab according to the flesh. Promises to natural succession were only to serve a temporary purpose. As all who have a spirit of trust in them are reckoned children of Abraham, so all who have in them the spirit of obedience may be reckoned children of Jonadab. Where the spirit of obedience is, knowledge of God's will becomes easy. Where the spirit of obedience is, actual obedience becomes easier and easier and more a matter of satisfaction.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTERS XXXVI.—XXXVIII.

NARRATIVE OF EVENTS PRECEDING THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE ROLL OF PROPHECY DESTROYED BY JEHOIAKIM.

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim (which, it is important to remember, was the first of Nebuchadnezzar) Jeremiah was directed to write down all his previous revelations, from the beginning of his ministry to the present day. Such, at least, is the literal meaning of vers. 1, 2; but it would seem that the literal meaning can hardly be the right one. First of all, a historically accurate reproduction of the prophecies would not have suited Jeremiah's object, which was not historical, but practical; he desired to give a salutary shock to the people by bringing before them the fatal consequences of their evil deeds. And next, it appears from ver. 29 that the purport of the roll which the king burned was that the King of Babylon should "come and destroy this land;" whereas it is clear that Jeremiah had uttered many other important declarations in the course of his already long ministry.

Now, it is remarkable, and points the way to a solution of the problem, that ch. xxv. is said (ver. 1) to have been written in the very same year to which the narrative before us refers, and that it is mainly concerned with the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar and its consequences (indeed, entirely so, if we admit that ch. xxv. 12, 26 have received interpolation).

Is not *this* the prophecy which Jeremiah dictated to Baruch?[1] and is not ver. 2 a loose, inaccurate statement due to a later editor? That the prophetic as well as the historical books have passed through various phases (without detriment to their religious value) is becoming more and more evident. The seventh and eighth chapters of Isaiah, and the thirty-seventh and thirty-eighth of the same book, have demonstrably been brought into their present shape by an editor (see Cheyne's 'Prophecies of Isaiah,' vol. i.); is it not highly reasonable to conjecture that these narrative chapters of Jeremiah have, to a greater or less extent, passed through a similar process (see below on ver. 6)? (The main point of this theory—that relative to ch. xxv.—has been brought forward by Dr. H. Grätz, in his 'Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums,' vol. xxiii. p. 298, etc.)

Ver. 4.—**Baruch.** Already mentioned as Jeremiah's attendant, in ch. xxxii. 12. He appears to have been of high rank (see on ver. 15), as Josephus, indeed, expressly states ('Ant.,' x. 9, 1). Maaseiah, his grandfather, was governor of the city (2 Chron. xxxiv. 8), and Seraiah his brother (ch. li. 59) held some equally honourable, though not so easily definable, position in the court.

Ver. 5.—**I am shut up.** Not so; Jeremiah was not detained by material force. Some strong reason he had (perhaps of a ceremonial kind), but as it was irrelevant to the narrative, it is not given. Render, *I am detained* (same verb as in 1 Sam. xxi. 7).

Ver. 6. — **Upon the fasting-day.** The mention of the fast-day suggests that ver. 9 is out of its place, which again confirms the view that the narrative before us has received its present form from an editor. **In the ears of all Judah** (see ver. 9).

Ver. 7.—**They will present their supplication**; literally, *their supplication will fall* (as margin). The phrase seems to be suggested by the gesture of a suppliant. Hence humility is one idea; but success is entirely another. That which lights down before one's eyes cannot be disregarded. Hence, in ch. xxxvii. 20 and xlii. 2, the Authorized Version renders, "be accepted." This is,

[1] There is a striking confirmation of this view in the relation of ch. vii. to ch. xxvi., the former containing the prophecy shortly summed up in the latter.

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at any rate, a better rendering than that quoted above, which is both weak in itself and obscures the connection. **And will return**; rather, *so that they return*. "Returning," *i.e.* repentance, is necessary, because their "evil ways" have provoked Jehovah to "great anger and fury;" but is only possible by the Divine help (comp. Acts v. 31, "To *give* repentance unto Israel"). Hence prayer is the first duty.

Ver. 9.—**In the fifth year of Jehoiakim.** It is remarkable that the Septuagint has here the *eighth* year; and Josephus, too, relates that Jehoiakim paid tribute to Nebuchadnezzar in his eighth year. This latter statement seems to tally with the notices in 2 Kings xxiv. The vassalage of Jehoiakim is there said to have lasted three years; this followed the rebellion; while the siege of Jerusalem was reserved for the short reign of Jehoiachin. Now, as this siege must have been the punishment of Jehoiakim's rebellion, and as the reign of the latter king lasted eleven years, we are brought to the same date as that given by Josephus for the commencement of the vassalage, viz. the eighth year. It is to this year, then, that 2 Kings xxiv. 1 refers when it says, "In his days Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant;" and also the narrative before us in the statement that "they proclaimed a fast before Jehovah to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people that came from the cities of Judah unto Jerusalem." What other event would have produced such a concourse of worshippers? The battle of Carchemish (which took place in the fourth year of Jehoiakim)? But it was by no means clear as yet that the consequences of this would be disastrous for Judah. Carchemish was too far off for the people of Judah to show such serious alarm (similarly Grätz, 'Monatsschrift,' etc., vol. xxiii. p. 300). If so, Jeremiah kept his prophecy by him for several years, till the right moment came. **The ninth month.** As this is a winter month (see ver. 22), Jeremiah evidently reckons by the Babylonian calendar, the ninth month of which, Kisiluv (Hebrew, Chisleu), began from the new moon of December.

Ver. 10.—**The chamber** (see on ch. xxxv. 4) **of Gemariah . . . the scribe.** Gemariah was favourably disposed to Jeremiah (ver. 25); he was probably the brother of Jeremiah's friend, Ahikam (ch. xxvi. 24). He was one of the royal secretaries, and reckoned among the "princes" (see ver. 12). **In the higher court.** "Higher" equivalent to "inner." **The new gate** (see on ch. xx. 2).

Ver. 12.—**He went down** (see on ch. xxvi. 10). **Sat there.** In deliberation on the affairs of the state. **Elishama the scribe.** Gemariah, then, had a colleague. So in Solomon's cabinet (if the word may be used) there were two *sōferim*, or secretaries, one perhaps for the civil and one for the military business (1 Kings iv. 3; comp. ch. lii. 25). **Elnathan.** Mentioned already, ch. xxvi. 22.

Ver. 14.—**Jehudi . . . the son of Cushi.** A genealogy which contains a history. Jehudi is not a true proper name, any more than Gadi ("a Gadite"), the quasi-name of the father of Menahem (2 Kings xv. 14), or than Cushi, the quasi-name of Jehudi's great-grandfather. Cushi himself was, doubtless, an Ethiopian, and probably (like Ebed-melech, ch. xxxviii. 7) a eunuch, or at least chamberlain; his son and grandson were both worshippers of Jehovah (as their names indicate), but were not qualified to become Jewish citizens. The Egyptian was not, indeed, to be abhorred, but not until the third generation could his descendants be admitted into "the congregation" (Deut. xxiii. 8). Egypt and Ethiopia were historically connected (see Lenormant's 'Ancient History,' index to vol. i.). For the name of "Jehudi," comp. "Jehudith," daughter of Beeri the Hittite (Gen. xxvi. 34).

Ver. 15.—**Sit down now.** The princes evidently recognize Baruch as belonging to a family of distinction (see on ver. 4); and from vers. 19, 25 we may infer that they were favourably inclined both to Baruch and to his master (comp. ch. xxvi.).

Ver. 16.—**They were afraid both one and other**; rather, *they turned shudderingly one to another*. Such an announcement as Jeremiah's at such a serious crisis startled them by its boldness. We may infer that the prophet had for some time, by Divine command, kept his sombre anticipations in the background. **We will surely tell the king**; rather, *we have to tell the king*. Friendly feeling would have prompted them to hush up the affair (see ch. xxvii. 20, 21), but duty forbade.

Ver. 17.—**How didst thou write all these words at his mouth?** Two questions seem to be combined here—"How didst thou write all these words?" and "Didst thou write it all at his mouth?" Baruch's answer is good for both.

Ver. 18.—**He pronounced**, etc.; rather, *He kept dictating . . . while I wrote with ink*, etc. The addition of the last clause suggests (and was, perhaps, intended to do so) that Baruch's function was simply mechanical.

Ver. 20.—**Into the court**; *i.e.* into the inner court, in which the royal apartments were apparently situated (comp. 1 Kings vii. 8).

Ver. 21.—**Which stood beside the king**; literally, . . . *above the king*. The standing

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courtiers, of course, rose above the king; comp. Isa. vi. 2, "Seraphim stood *above* him."

Ver. 22.—**In the winter-house**; *i.e.* that part of the royal palace (*beth*, house, may also be rendered *apartment*) which was arranged for a winter habitation (comp. Amos iii. 15). According to Dr. Thomson ('The Land and the Book,' p. 309), the more airy part of a house is called "summer-house," and the more sheltered room "winter-house." The ninth month, in which the events now being related took place, corresponded approximately to our December. It was, therefore, the cold and rainy season; December is a stormy month in Palestine. **A fire on the hearth**; rather, *in the chafing-dish* (or, *brazier*). It was a vessel with live coals placed in the centre of the room, still used in the East in cold weather.

Ver. 23.—**Three or four leaves**; rather, *columns* or *compartments*. "Leaves" would imply that it was a book out of which Jehudi read, whereas it was a roll (*m'gillah* never has any other meaning). But "books" were not yet known, nor would a knife have been necessary to separate the pages. **He cut it.** The subject may be either the king or Jehudi (at the bidding of the king). The term implies that the action of cutting was repeated several times; but we are not to suppose that each successive portion was cut off as it was read. The indignation of the hearer translated itself into the repeated mutilation of the roll, until all the roll was (cast into the fire and) consumed. **With the penknife**; literally, *with the scribe's knife*. **On the hearth**; rather, *in the chafing-dish* (or, *brazier*).

Ver. 24.—**Yet they were not afraid.** Unlike Josiah (2 Kings xxii. 11), and even Ahab (1 Kings, xxi. 27). **Nor any of his servants**; *i.e.* the courtiers, as opposed to the "princes."

Ver. 26.—**The son of Hammelech**; rather, *a royal prince* (we should render similarly in ch. xxxviii. 6; 1 Kings xxii. 26; 2 Kings xi. 1, 2; Zeph. i. 8). We have seen already that the number of such royal princes was very large (see on ch. xvii. 9); any one, in fact, who had a king among his ancestors was a "royal prince." **The Lord hid them**; *i.e.* saved them from discovery.

Vers. 27—32.—Punishment denounced against Jehoiakim, and second writing of the former prophecy.

Ver. 29.—**Thou shalt say to Jehoiakim**; rather, *concerning Jehoiakim*. Intercourse between Jehoiakim and the prophet was broken off by the preceding scene. The speech begins in the *oratio directa*, but soon passes into the *obliqua*. **Cause to cease . . . man and beast.** A forcible description of the completeness of the devastation.

Ver. 30.—**He shall have none to sit**, etc. Substantially a repetition of the prophecy in ch. xxii. 18, 19 (comp. 30).

Ver. 31.—**I will bring upon them**, etc. (comp. ch. xxxv. 17; xix. 15).

Ver. 32.—**Many like words.** Thus Jehoiakim gained nothing by his sin (comp. Introduction).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—4.—*The writing of the roll.* I. WHO WERE ENGAGED IN THE WRITING OF THE ROLL? 1. *God.* (1) The thoughts of the prophecies to be recorded were inspired by God. "Prophecy" means "inspired utterance." Jeremiah was to write "the words that I have spoken unto thee." We should seek in the Bible chiefly, not the scribe's letters (grammatical study), nor the prophet's words (historical theology), but God's thoughts (spiritual truth). (2) God commanded the writing of the roll (ver. 2). The Bible is given to us by God. It is his will that the sayings of ancient prophets and apostles should be the lamp for all ages. Therefore (*a*) he will bless the right reading of the Bible, and (*b*) he will call us to account for the use we make of it. 2. *Jeremiah.* God does not speak to mankind by a direct and audible voice as with the thunder-tones of Sinai. He speaks through an instrument—a man, a prophet. And this prophet is plainly not just a mechanical mouthpiece to the Divine voice. His personality counts for something. His style, mode of thought, experience, general knowledge, spiritual condition, etc., all mould his utterances of inspired truth. Jeremiah's prophecies are characteristic of Jeremiah. 3. *Baruch.* The scribe has neither the genius to conceive the thought, nor the oratorical and literary gifts to clothe it in language. He is a simple amanuensis. Yet his work is important. For some reason not expressed, possibly like St. Paul on account of bodily weakness, Jeremiah did not write out his prophecies with his own hand. Thus work was found for Baruch. God finds offices corresponding to all varieties of gifts. But the less gifted are too often ambitious to perform the more honoured tasks of greater men, or, failing in these, they are often reluctant to fulfil their more lowly calling.

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II. WHY WAS THE ROLL WRITTEN? This roll was not to contain a new composition. It was to be only a writing of utterances which had already been made public. Why, then, was it written? 1. That the prophecies might be *preserved*. Truth is eternal. A truth once discovered should be cherished as a lasting possession. It may be lost, but it can never decay. "The Word of the Lord endureth for ever;" therefore the record of it should be preserved as of permanent value. 2. That the prophecies might reach a *larger audience*. The roll could be frequently perused and by various readers. Revelation is not for the few initiated; it is for all who need its light. 3. That the prophecies might be *reread* to those who had already heard them. The use of them was not expended when they were first spoken. We are too ready to be attracted by mere novelty. The latest books and the latest ideas are run after to the neglect of greater thoughts and greater works of older date. But truth is more important than novelty. And old truths need to be repeated, because (1) they may have been received with inattention at the first hearing; (2) they may be better understood or newly applicable under fresh circumstances, and after the hearer has gained larger powers of insight by his growing experience; (3) they may be so profound as to be practically inexhaustible, or so eternally fresh and inspiring as to be always useful; (4) they fail of their end till they affect our conduct, and must be repeated "line upon line" while men fail to do what they know. 4. That the prophecies might he *studied carefully and compared together*. So we should study the Bible, searching the Scriptures and comparing parts together, as we can only do when the whole lies written before us.

III. WHAT WAS THE SCOPE AND AIM OF THE ROLL? 1. It was a record of *God's wrath against sin and a denunciation of judgment*. The words so important that they needed to be thus recorded were spoken "against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations" (ver. 2). People like to forget disagreeable ideas and cherish only those that please them. Yet there are times when it is for our own profit to face them. Surely it is best to know our danger if by the knowledge of it we can find a means to escape it, or, at the worst, be prepared to meet it. But if the revelation of judgment, and of temporal judgment, contained in Jeremiah's prophecies was so precious as to be committed to writing under a solemn Divine commission, what value shall we set on the revelations of heavenly things and declarations of the glad tidings of salvation that are written in other parts of the Bible? 2. It aimed at *leading the people to repentance*. (Ver. 3.) The threats of future calamities were first uttered with this end, and they were to be repeated for the same object. Thus the darkest words of revelation are spoken in mercy. If they are repeated, it is because God is so forbearing and anxious to save that he will not give his people up. The aim of revelation is practical. It is a lamp to our feet (Ps. cxix. 105). The chief purpose of its warnings and its words of grace is to lead us back from sin to God. Thus the Bible, though the crowning work of all literature, should not be regarded chiefly from a literary point of view, but rather as containing messages from our Father to guide and help our conduct.

Vers. 5—21.—*The reading of the roll.* I. THE READER. Baruch, the secretary of Jeremiah, is sent to read the roll. We do not know what cause detains the prophet. He has often made bold utterances in public before this. But if he cannot go the truth must not be hidden. "The Word of God is not bound" (2 Tim. ii. 9). Truth is more important than the speaker. It matters little who is the messenger; all importance attaches to the message. Men forget this when they run after a Jeremiah and neglect a Baruch, though the scribe may be the bearer of the prophet's teachings. We should recollect how much more important the gospel preached is than the man who preaches it. If a Chrysostom, a Paul, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel but the true gospel of Christ, "let him be anathema." But if Christ is proclaimed, we must be thankful for that, though the preacher and his conduct may not quite approve themselves to us (Phil. i. 18). Perhaps it was best that the prophet should not appear in person to repeat his message. His presence might rouse personal feelings to the neglect of his message. He desired the truth to carry its own fair weight. Baruch did his work bravely and modestly. In repeating the prophet's unpopular words, he would invite the odium that attached to them to pass on to himself. But *his* duty was to read the roll. *God* would see to the consequences. With this courage there was a remarkable modesty. The occasion was a tempting opportunity for Baruch to exercise his own powers by way

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of comment or addition. But he said nothing beyond what was written in the roll. He knew his place. The scribe is not a prophet. Why should not the great sermons of great preachers be sometimes read in our churches?

II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE READING. The roll was read to three audiences. 1. The *people* (vers. 9, 10). The Bible is a book for the people, not for the priests or the learned only. The occasion of that reading was "a fasting-day" (ver. 6). Then the people would be in the best mood for receiving the call to repentance. We should learn to speak "in season." The place of the reading was the temple (ver. 10). Instruction should be associated with worship. 2. The *princes* (vers. 11—19). Divine truth is of importance to all classes. They who are in responsible positions are especially called upon to study the signs of the times. 3. The *king* (vers. 20, 21). It was necessary that what concerned the fate of the kingdom should receive the most careful consideration of its monarch. Even kings must bow before the utterance of truth. A prophet can speak with authority to a king.

III. THE EFFECT OF READING. The effect on the people is not here indicated. Probably little moral good came of it; but there was evidently some impression made if the feelings of one man, Michaiah, may be taken in illustration. This man was so much stirred by what he heard that he immediately reported it to the princes at the court (vers. 11—13). From this report other consequences flowed. If but one man out of a great congregation is seriously impressed by a sermon, that sermon has not failed; possibly through the one man it may be instrumental in effecting vast and lasting good. When the roll was read to the princes they were first dismayed (ver. 16). How graphic is that picture of the great men of the kingdom as "they turned shuddering one to another," terrified and confounded by the prophet's words! Perhaps some of them had heard the same words before unmoved. The time may come when the most hardened will be roused. The terror of princes might be a wholesome beginning of a genuine repentance. But if no appropriate action followed, it would soon die away, leaving the conscience the more hardened and demoralized. We need to "bring forth *fruits* meet for repentance." The princes inquired as to the origin of the roll. Were its words true? On what authority were they written? Such inquiries are reasonable. We should have a reason for accepting what we believe to be a Divine message. Yet it is dangerous to divert attention from the moral weight of truth by too much intellectual criticism about literary curiosities. The princes reported the matter to the king with a warning to Baruch—patriotic and generous conduct. The king's reception of the book was very different. Unlike the princes, who neither accepted the message without question, nor rejected it for its unpleasant contents, but inquired calmly and carefully as to the authority of it, Jehoiakim flew into a rage and hastily destroyed it. What an act of supreme folly! The truth was not the less important because the record of it was burnt. "We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth" (2 Cor. xiii. 8).

Vers. 22—26.—*The burning of the roll.* When the princes informed Jehoiakim of the circumstances connected with the reading of Jeremiah's prophecies, the king sent an attendant, Jehudi, to fetch the roll and read it to him. It has been said that he showed contempt for the Word of God by relegating the reading to a page instead of sending for Baruch. But Baruch had probably escaped to seclusion at the warning of the courtiers (ver. 19), and as he had left the roll in other hands, what was more natural than that Jehoiakim should send for it without a thought of Jeremiah's appointment of a reader? Indeed, it matters little who reads; the question is—How is the reading received?

I. CONSIDER THE ACTION OF THE KING. It was December—the cold and rainy month. A fire blazed on the brazier. As the roll was read, the king cut it up and flung the sections into the fire, till he had destroyed the whole of it. His action was one of rage and folly. He would have no more of the prophet's dreadful words for himself; he would prevent them from further influencing others; he would vent his rage upon the record, though he could not touch the truths contained in it. Are there not many who inwardly sympathize with this violence of Jehoiakim? They dare not say they wish the Bible to be destroyed. But there are things in it which testify against them so strongly that they would keep them for ever out of sight. The special features of Jehoiakim's action are significant. 1. It was *beyond his rights.* King as he was, the roll did not belong to him. Neither had he any authority over the inspired word of prophecy.

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Earthly power confers no privilege and power in Divine things. 2. It was *brutally violent.* Jehoiakim cut up and burnt the roll—that was all he could do. To refute its contents was beyond his power. 3. It was *vain and futile.* The roll might be burnt, but the truth it contained could not be destroyed, nor could it even be suppressed. Another roll could be written, and the burning of the first would be an advertisement for the second. Violent opposition thus benefits the cause it would destroy. The burning of Tyndale's Bibles was one of the best means for securing the circulation of a larger number of English Bibles. 4. It was *suggested by a temptation.* The fire was at hand—an unusual thing, apparently, just suited to the occasion. There is an evil providence as well as a higher providence of good. It is not safe to follow the superficial indication of events. That is as likely to come from below as from above. 5. It was *deliberate.* Piece by piece the roll was cut up and burnt. Hasty passion might excuse the first burning, but not the whole process. 6. It was *complete.* All the roll was consumed. There was no discrimination. The act was symbolical. The rejection of one part of truth will lead to the rejection of the whole of it. 7. It was *really injurious only to the perpetrator.* The roll could not feel; the truth could not be destroyed; another roll could be written. But the burning of the roll was to the king's own loss. That roll contained the only available prescription for the healing of the distresses of himself and his kingdom. The Bible is really sent for the good of the worst of men. Their rejection of it is only to their own loss.

II. CONSIDER THE CONDUCT OF THE COURTIERS. 1. *Some stood by and watched the burning.* They did not aid it; but they did not hinder it. Therefore they shared the responsibility of the king. For we are resposible for the evil we will not restrain as well as for that we commit, so that in doing little harm we may yet be guilty of much. The courtiers had no valid excuse for their indifference. Royal authority cannot justify acquiescence in wrong. Personal fear is no excuse, since it is better to die for the right than desert it in sheer cowardice. These men showed no fear (ver. 24). They had been alarmed (ver. 16). But religious fears are transitory, and if not acted on leave the heart more hardened than they find it. 2. *Some expostulated.* These men had been more permanently affected by the reading of Baruch. They carried the impressions made in the temple to their conduct at the court. That is a proof of a real influence of the words of Jeremiah upon them. It is little that we feel the weight of religion in church. The test is how far this dwells with us in the world, and when it would urge to unpopular, difficult, or dangerous actions.

Vers. 27—32.—*The rewriting of the roll.* Under the inspiration of God Jeremiah requires Baruch to write another roll, containing all that was in the burnt roll and also some additional matter. We may take the following points connected with the rewriting of the roll—

I. THE FRUSTRATION OF ALL ATTEMPTS TO SUPPRESS DIVINE TRUTH. Jehoiakim is a king and a tyrant. But there is a limit to his power. It is vain for him to attempt to hinder the declaration of God's truth. If one roll is burnt another can be written. If one prophet were killed another could be raised up. Truth is eternal. It will survive all enmity, and it will find its way ultimately to the light. He who is against it plays a losing game.

II. THE PERSISTENCE OF GOD'S DESIGNS. They are not to be set aside by all the scheming and all the violence of men. God does not change because we oppose his will. There is something awful in the thought of that great, inflexible will, firm as granite against all the raging of man's foolish passions. By opposition we can only bring ourselves into collision with it to our hurt, as the waves dash themselves to spray on the rock they cannot break. We cannot stay its invincible progress—

> "Though the mills of God grind slowly,
> Yet they grind exceeding small."

If we wish to find God's will working with us and for our good, we must submit to it. We cannot expect the great God to change his plans to suit our inclinations.

III. THE CONTINUANCE OF GOD'S MERCY. Why should the roll be rewritten? The threats it contained could be executed without any reissue of them. If all fair warnings were disregarded, no more could be required. True, and no more were required.

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Yet out of his great, long-suffering grace God issued his warnings afresh. This is the deeper truth that underlies the command to write out the prophecies once more. The same truth is illustrated in all the history of the Jews. God sent a succession of prophets, "rising up early and sending," to impress upon the people the same unheeded lessons. The continuance of revelation with us is a reminder of God's forbearing mercy.

Ver. 32 (last clause).—*The development of revelation.* "And there were added besides unto them many like words." The second roll was a transcript of the first, but with numerous additions, though these were all similar in character to the original prophecies. We have here, on a small scale, an instance of that development of revelation which is evolved on similar principles through the whole realm of knowledge.

I. REVELATION FOLLOWS A PROCESS OF GRADUAL DEVELOPMENT. There are those to whom the word "development" has an evil sound, because of the excuse Roman Catholics have found in it for perversions of New Testament doctrines; while others object to it on account of its use in the scientific world, where they think it is meant to take the place of the will and wisdom of God. But the abuse of a word should not hide us from the important idea that it naturally denotes. Nothing is more true and grand and wonderful in all God's works than the principle of development which his great power and wisdom has made to run through them. The dawn advances through twilight to full day; the seed grows slowly—"first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear;" man begins life as an infant, and toils up to his full stature through years of childhood and youth; the kingdom of heaven began as a grain of mustard seed, and is slowly spreading till, from the work of that little company in the upper room at Jerusalem, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." Revelation is no exception to the same universal Divine process. God did not flash all his truth upon the world in one dazzling moment. The Bible is a slow growth of many centuries. Progress is observable in the Old Testament. Isaiah saw further than it was given to Abraham to see. Jeremiah's vision of the new covenant (ch. xxxi. 31—34) is in advance of the Levitical Law. The New Testament is a decided manifestation of broader knowledge and fuller light than the earlier revelation contained. Christ said to his disciples, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John xvi. 12). St. Paul's teachings go beyond the doctrines held in his day by the Church at Jerusalem. We cannot say that God has nothing further to reveal. The Christian believes that "holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation." But all the analogy of God's past action would lead us to think that there may be much truth which men were not at first able to see in the Scripture, and yet which may be known in successive ages and found to be of great profit. 1. The *human occasion* of this development of revelation may be seen in the fact that the thoughts of men grow. God reveals his truth in human thinking. Men must seek him, and, feeling after the truth, are rewarded by God's revelation. But the revelation is proportionate to the progress of the search. 2. The *Divine purpose* of this development may be noted in such facts as these: God reveals truth as man is able to receive it, as he is spiritually educated to understand it, as he is in a moral condition to profit by it, as changing circumstances may bring need for new stages in the development of it.

II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF REVELATION IS CONSISTENT WITH ITSELF. 1. *It does not set aside old truth.* In the new roll all the contents of the old roll were rewritten, so that the fresh matter was not a substitute but an addition. Christ came to fulfil the Law and the prophets, not to destroy them (Matt. v. 17). The gospel exceeds but does not supersede the spiritual truth of the Old Testament. No new discovery can ever destroy what is once known to be real and true. 2. This development maintains *an essential likeness between its earliest and its latest stages.* The added words of Jeremiah's roll were "like unto" those which were first written. All truth must ultimately harmonize. One great test of a new doctrine is its agreement with previously established truth. All Christian truth must agree with the teachings of Christ and his apostles. That many so-called developments of truth are really perversions of truth may be proved by the application of this test. Thus to us Protestants it seems clear that many Roman Catholic dogmas which profess to be developments of Christianity are so utterly contrary to its spirit that they must be regarded either as pagan

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additions or as relapses towards Judaism. So there are "liberal" notions that are really negations of essential elements of the gospel. It is monstrous to call these developments. The oak is a development of the acorn; but the hollow, blasted stump, which is the last stage in the history of the tree, is surely not a further result of the same process. Decay is not development.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—4.—(*Vide* ch. xxx. 1—3.)—M.

Vers. 5—8.—*Vicarious ministry in holy things.* The "vicar," an ecclesiastical officer of mediæval times,—explain the origin and nature of his duties. Show how large this question of vicarious service, and how universal its necessity, in business, society, the state, the Church, etc. This incident illustrates—

I. ITS ESSENTIAL NATURE. Not merely that one should do, be, or suffer instead of another, but as representative of him. More or less consciously, sympathetically, adequately. That one man and not another should do a given duty, for instance, may be but the chance of fortune; but that he should do it *for* and *in place of* that other is for him to be that other's "vicar." This essential character of the transaction is not altered by the fact of the superiority, equality, or inferiority of the substitute.

II. ITS SUGGESTIVE INTEREST. An element of pathos and mystery. Perhaps the end better served in this than in the alternative way. Conceivable that the reading, the authoritative publication, and the supernatural interest, may have been enhanced rather than otherwise by the substitution. 1. *The community of true service.* How different in importance, etc., the function of the prophet in receiving the message and communicating it from that of the scribe! yet both are on this occasion indispensable. One man's service the condition of another's or its complement. All true service associated in relation to final ends and rewards (John iv. 37, 38; Heb. xi. 40). 2. *An impression of urgency produced.* This was the message it was absolutely important for Judah to hear at that time. God always speaks at the right time, even when that requires extraordinary efforts and unusual means. The latter on this occasion must have eloquently suggested that *now* was the "accepted time" and "the day of salvation." 3. *The earnestness of the prophet and his Inspirer.* Jeremiah was the true friend of the nation and the devoted servant of Jehovah, therefore he did not excuse himself from the task because of its difficulties. 4. *How inevitable the message!* It was not to be evaded or suppressed. From the prison or hiding-place the prophet will still be heard.

III. ITS ETHICS. Service of the kind here described was justifiable only on the supposition that the original or principal in responsibility is unable to do his own proper work, or that it can be better done by being delegated to another. Jeremiah is careful to explain why he does not do it himself. Would that the reasons for non-attendance in the sanctuary, or inoccupation in spiritual work, were as real and valid in the case of professing Christians! 1. *On the part of the person instead of whom the service was rendered.* He did not ask his substitute to do what he could do himself; and what he alone could do was done with the utmost care and diligence. It is calculated that the writing out of the roll from the prophet's dictation occupied nine months, and many delays and difficulties must have been experienced. His solicitude, too, on behalf of the proper delivery of the message by Baruch, is very instructive and inspiring. He sought (God's end in) the repentance of the people, and everything was to conspire to produce this. By example and moral influence he sought to fill Baruch with his own enthusiasm, and a sense of the importance of the task. The preacher is the vicar of the Church; so with the Sunday school teacher, etc. By prayer, sympathy, and loving co-operation Christians should encourage these. 2. *On the part of the substitute.* Baruch sought to do his part faithfully and with minute exactitude. His success in producing an impression proved how he exerted himself. A sense of responsibility should ever rest upon those who minister in the house of God. A certain measure of boldness was also required to do such a thing. The people or their princes might turn against him. Boldness is essential to the preaching of the gospel. But there cannot

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but occur to most readers the parallelism there is in all this to what Christ has undertaken for us. Another temple from whose service we are "shut up" by reason of personal unfitness, or that we remain in the flesh. Christ, our great Forerunner and Vicar, or Substitute, has entered into its holy of holies, with his own eternal sacrifice and intercession. Upon him all our hope must be placed; we must follow him in spirit; and we must imitate Jeremiah in the zeal and labour with which we execute our part of the great process of salvation.—M.

Vers. 9—16.—*Free course of the Word of God.* The progress made by the messages of Jeremiah when read aloud in the scribe's cell at the entrance of the higher court of the temple was very remarkable, and fully justified the great care and ingenuity with which it was effected.

I. A SANCTIFIED INGENUITY SHOULD BE SHOWN IN TAKING ADVANTAGE OF OR CREATING SUITABLE OCCASIONS FOR MAKING KNOWN GOD'S WORD.

II. THE WORD OF GOD IS COMMENDED BY ITS GENERAL AND SPECIAL HUMAN INTEREST.

III. WHEN ONE INSTRUMENTALITY FAILS, GOD WILL RAISE UP ANOTHER, UNTIL HIS MESSAGE ATTAINS ITS DESTINATION.—M.

Vers. 16—18.—*The mystery of inspiration.* I. THE NATURAL DESIRE TO SOLVE IT. 1. *This has its root in mere curiosity.* A desire to know for the sake of knowing—laudable enough in itself, but in danger of passing into irreverence and idle speculation. Religious movements and supernatural phenomena have excited this wonder in all ages. Religion interests many as a problem, where it is refused attention or respect as a law. 2. *This is increased by the attraction of the forbidden and unlawful.* An anticipation of the "profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science [the knowledge] falsely so called," against which Timothy is warned (1 Tim. vi. 20; cf. Col. ii. 8, 18, 19). The sin of Simon Magus was analogous. 3. *It is also increased by the natural mind's intolerance of mystery.* There are multitudes who would willingly inquire *how* a miracle may be wrought, who have no desire to learn *why*. It is humiliating to our natural pride to realize that there are so many things in the universe we cannot explain. The authority which the supernatural lends to the doctrines and revelations of religion is resented.

II. HOW IT IS SATISFIED. 1. *The direction of their questioning.* They asked concerning the mechanical process—the manner, etc., of the prophet, apparently unconscious that the real problem lay behind all that. "Did the prophet stammer whilst the inspiration was upon him? Was his manner wild or strange?" Now, we know that the manner of the person receiving Divine inspiration may be perfectly indistinguishable from that of those who are under ordinary human conditions. But they fell into the error of supposing that, when that was determined, the solution of the problem would be advanced. 2. *Where it ended.* There is no further curiosity; they remain at arm's length from the kernel of the whole question. The moral conditions of it are of no concern to them. Theirs is the radical carelessness with respect to religion *as such* which characterizes the carnal mind. Their inquiries ended just where they ought to have begun; just as those of many nowadays—lingerers or loiterers in the porch, who never enter into the temple. Conscience could answer much that curiosity leaves untouched. The deep necessity of God-communion for every man and nation to which it witnesses, is what the whole process of revelation presupposes. God will not leave man alone. His supernatural workings continually witness to his presence and authority. And man cannot do without God and his Word.—M.

Vers. 20—26.—"*Jehoiakim's penknife.*" This became a proverbial phrase for religious indifference of the most callous description. Not that Jehoiakim actually cut the roll himself; but Jehudi, who did it, was evidently under his orders. It is a little uncertain as to whether the whole of the manuscript, or a part only, was read; but as "had read" represents an imperfect tense, and the words "till all the roll was consumed" imply a gradual process, it seems more probable that the former was the case. There is here the same unconquerable spirit of curiosity to know what the prophet said, utterly separated from religious earnestness or obedience. It is a fearfully impressive tableau which is presented, suggestive of—

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I. THE ENMITY OF THE CARNAL MIND TO DIVINE TRUTH. The king cannot leave the manuscript alone, but he strives to make up for that weakness by: 1. *Contempt.* A page or domestic scribe is employed to read, instead of the king reading for himself; whilst the chief officers sit with their royal master, ridiculing it. There are many who dare not part company with religion, who revenge themselves by making light of its warnings and ordinances. Their contempt is a little overdone, in proportion to the latent, unconfessed fear. 2. *Destruction.* Dislike of the truth itself transfers itself also to the vehicle by which it is conveyed. It is a sign of the indwelling of the evil one, who seeks to destroy the works of God. 3. *Persecution.* The servants of God who have communicated his Word are also hated, and they are sought out with a view to their hurt. This is a characteristic of the confirmed sinner, which repeats itself over and over again in history. The world hates the servants of Christ because it hates their Master.

II. THE HARDNESS OF HEART PRODUCED BY CONTINUAL SIN. 1. *Deliberate profanity.* If the text is rightly interpreted, it describes a repeated action, performed with the greatest coolness and clearest intention. How different from that young king who rent his garments at the message from the book so mysteriously lost and found again! 2. *Resolute disobedience.* The treatment to which the roll was subjected showed how thoroughly the mind of the king was made up. And the remonstrances of his councillors were unheeded. Evidently the messages of God would be wasted upon such a king, and consequently his doom would be forthwith pronounced (vers. 30, 31).

III. THE FOOLISHNESS OF THOSE WHO FIGHT AGAINST GOD. This is revealed in their methods. Here the burning of the book and the persecution of its authors are all that occurs to the infatuated king to do. But the prophet and his scribe are nowhere to be found, for "God hid them;" and the burnt manuscript appears in a second and enlarged edition. Persecution and the *Index Expurgatorius* have been potent allies of the truth they have been used to suppress. It is an unequal warfare when God is on one side and man on the other. In such a case the truest wisdom is capitulation. God's indictment against us is unanswerable, and there is no escaping his judgments. When such devices occur to the sinner, he may well fear for himself. Truly understood, these warnings are but the efforts of Divine love to awaken to repentance, and thus afford opportunity for its free and uninterrupted exercise.—M.

Ver. 26.—"*The Lord hid them.*" I. TO WHAT STRAITS THE CAUSE OF GOD IS SOMETIMES REDUCED! Those in high position are opposed to it, and its advocates and representatives have to seek concealment. No open ministry was, therefore, possible. Self-preservation had to be first attended to. There have been times when religion was tolerated, but as under apology; *this* was an instance of utter exclusion. How good men must have despaired and bad men triumphed! All that God could do for his servants seemed to be to hide them. At the same time, how easy it would be to miscalculate the moral power of the Word! Is not persecution better than languid indifference?

II. HOW HOPELESS THEIR EFFORTS WHO CONTEND WITH GOD! With seeming ease and yet mysterious skill, the secrets of nature are made to subserve his will. And even that which is, as it were, an extremity—a last resource—is so mysteriously effected as to convey the impression of infinite skill and endless resources. 1. *They are baffled at the very outset.* There seems to have been some interposition of the Divine in making the concealment of the prophet and his companion so inscrutable; and it impressed men. All the means at their disposal were exhausted in their efforts to discover them, but in vain. It is: 2. *With an apparent ease.* It is but one move on the great chessboard, but it is effectual and sufficient. It is even conceivable that the pursued took no special pains to conceal themselves, but left it in the hand of him whom they served. 3. *And with significant gentleness.* Some grander deliverance he might have effected, but this is enough. And it simply prevents the wicked king and his court from adding further to their guilt. How thankful ought wicked men to be that they are not suffered to carry out all their evil designs! So God sometimes "prevents," that he may not have to pursue and destroy.

III. HOW SECURE GOD'S SERVANTS ARE WHEN HE UNDERTAKES FOR THEM! It is merely said he "hid them," that their concealment was effectual and inviolate being

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understood without further words. Elijah (1 Kings xvii. 2) and his successor (2 Kings vi.) were so hidden. The Lord of the universe knows its every secret. 1. *In temporal things.* The children of God will not escape misfortune or sorrow. Persecutions are amongst the promises. But the true evil of evil will not reach them. They cannot know it. He hides them in his "secret place" until the storm and fury are overpast. Nay, in distress his tenderness will be the more conspicuous and manifest. "Hide me under the shadow of thy wings" (Ps. xvii. 8); "I flee unto thee to hide me" (Ps. cxliii. 9). There is an inward, inaccessible peace, which is the gift of every true disciple (John xiv. 27). 2. *In things spiritual.* Isaiah spoke of the day when "a man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind," etc. (xxxii. 2). And we know that our "life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. iii. 3). When the unpardoned shall call upon the rocks to fall on them, and the hills to cover them from his wrath, they that believe shall be safe in the keeping of their Lord. 3. *And this is so because the saints are precious in his sight.* He keeps them as the apple of his eye. Not a hair of their head shall fall to the ground without their Father. They are the firstfruits of his Son's agony and sacrifice, and bear his likeness. All the resources of his kingdom are held in readiness for their salvation.—M.

Vers. 27—32.—*The Word of God: wherein it can and wherein it cannot be destroyed.* I. WHEREIN IT CAN BE DESTROYED. 1. *In its outward form and medium.* The roll; inspired records; religious institutions and means of grace; individual believers and Churches. 2. *As a vehicle of blessing to a man's own soul.* Jehoiakim deliberately cut off his own salvation, and, destroying the roll, he caused his name to be blotted out of the book of life. To him it brought no blessing. We can destroy the Word of God in this way *for ourselves*, by heedlessness, unbelief, disrespect, enmity.

II. WHEREIN IT CANNOT BE DESTROYED. Even over the material embodiment and vehicle of the Word shall we not believe that Providence watches? God restores, enlarges, multiplies his Word. But: 1. *The spiritual Word cannot be destroyed.* It is independent of stone, or parchment, or paper; is continually renewed by the Divine Spirit in its communications with the children of men. Even at the worst there is a "law written upon the heart." It cannot be too strongly impressed upon men's minds that, were all the Bibles and manuscripts in the world destroyed, God would restore his Word and continue to reveal himself; like that temple which, destroyed, would be raised in three days again. 2. *The consequences of God's Word*, whether these be *good* or *evil*. What he willeth will be, and his Word stands sure. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away," etc.; *i.e.* what it foretells and declares will remain certain and will fulfil itself. It secures to the saint an indestructible life and inheritance, and to the sinner the reward of his transgression. The true escape from the threatenings of the Divine Word is not to destroy it, but to obey its teachings and yield ourselves to the discipline and grace of Christ.—M.

Vers. 1—32.—*Hearers of God's Word.* This chapter brings before us an instructive variety of these hearers.

I. SUCH AS THE PROPHET. To him and such as he the Word of God came, and was received with reverent submission and diligently obeyed at all costs. They could say, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth."

II. SUCH AS THE PEOPLE GENERALLY. (Ver. 10.) The mass seemed unaffected. We do not read of their being in any wise wrought upon by what they had heard. But there was an exception (ver. 11). Michaiah was really aroused, impressed, and alarmed. Often it is thus; the general congregation unmoved, but one here, one there, touched and led to God.

III. SUCH AS MICHAIAH. We have seen how it affected him. He could not keep it to himself, but went to tell the princes of it (ver. 12). He unfeignedly believed. Now, he came of a godly house. It was his grandfather who, in King Josiah's day, had first received the book of the Law which had been found in the temple. Hilkiah the high priest gave it to him, knowing, no doubt, that it would be reverently dealt with. And so it was; for first he read it himself, and then read it aloud to the young king, and that led to the reformation which the king carried out. And the father of this Michaiah was a man of a like spirit. From the balcony of his house Baruch had read his book to the

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people; Michaiah's father had lent him a pulpit. And it was this same man who, with two others, tried, but in vain, to stay the king's hand when about to burn the book (ver. 25). Hence Michaiah came of a godly stock. It is the training of such homes that more than aught else prepares and predisposes the heart to receive the Word of God.

IV. SUCH AS THE PRINCES. These are a very instructive group, (vers. 11—26). They listened patiently to the Word, and gave it much attention. They were much moved, and desired to hear it over again exactly as it had been given, and so they sent for Baruch, and listened in like manner to him. They seriously deliberate, and resolve to go and warn the king; for that in all probability was their motive. They show affection to God's servants, and desire to protect both them and the written Word. They go in to the king, notwithstanding they must have known the peril of so doing. And some of them endeavour to stay the king from his evil intent to destroy the book. But there they stop. The king's rage overpower them, and they keep silence when they ought to utter strong protest. They are an illustration of "the fear of man which bringeth a snare." How often the like cause leads to like unfaithfulness still!

V. SUCH AS THE KING. The words fix his attention, but they excite his rage and then they ensure his doom. He comes to hate both the Word and the writers of the Word, and he disregards the feeble remonstrances of its timid friends. Thus he seals his own destruction, as such ever do. *We* are hearers of the Word. To which class do we belong?—C.

Ver. 2.—*The written Word.* "Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee." "This is the first recorded instance of the formation of a canonical book, and of the special purpose of its formation." No doubt other prophets had committed to writing more or less of their teachings—the quotations of one prophet from another, the later from the earlier, prove this; but here is the first record of any such act, and hence it has especial interest. It is the forerunner of all those several Scriptures which together form now the depository of our religion, and justify the well-known saying of Chillingworth, "The Bible and the Bible only is the religion of Protestants." For note—

I. OUR RELIGION DEPENDS ON THE WRITTEN WORD. Great contempt has been poured on the idea of a "book revelation." As if there were something even ridiculous in the idea of God revealing himself by means of a book. A recent missionary traveller (Gilmour) among the Mongols states that they feel the force of this objection very strongly, and that when the missionary holds up his little Bible as the revelation of God, it seems to them very absurd. But these people can claim distinguished companionship amongst our own countrymen. And in addition to the rejection of a book revelation at all, this particular book, the Bible, is objected to exceedingly. All manner of ridicule is poured on it, and there is scarce a single ground on which fault could be found with it which some one has not occupied. But in reply note—

II. THE WRITTEN WORD IS, HOWEVER, NOT THE REVELATION BUT ONLY THE RECORD OF IT. It is not claimed for it to be more than this. God did not give to mankind a book, but he revealed himself to "holy men of old," and especially through the Lord Jesus Christ. And this book is the record of that revelation. Hence the only question that concerns us is—Is it a faithful record?

III. BUT SUCH A RECORD WAS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY. For if the existence of God be allowed, and that it is his desire to reclaim men from their sin and to bring them back to himself, it may be asked: 1. *How could this be done except by his revealing himself to men?* They *must* be enabled to know him, and to know him in such manner as would be likely to move them in the direction desired. 2. But if it be granted that a revelation was a necessity, *how could that revelation be of use to mankind at large unless it were put on record?* For all events are related to time and space; they must have happened—God's revelation of himself amongst others—somewhen and somewhere. But how, except by a record, could those who dwelt in other generations and in other parts of the world know of this revelation? But for that it may as well not have been. 3. *And so long as the Divine ideas are conveyed to our mind, what does it matter about the means employed?* All the magnificence of nature—the Alpine heights, the starry universe, etc.—serve us only as they convey true and worthy ideas, as they wake up in us fit and appropriate thoughts. If they fail in this, they might as well not be so far

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as we are concerned. But there are many who never have opportunities of beholding the magnificence of nature—their lives are one long round of sordid toil in scenes dark and squalid; and others who have such opportunities are too little educated to learn from them what they assuredly have to tell. The road that leads from nature up to nature's God is a thinly travelled one; few go that way. But now, if by the written Word, which can be carried everywhere, perpetuated, multiplied, and is everywhere and at all times accessible—if by this there can be conveyed to the mind fit, true, and heart-moving ideas about God, what an advantage this is! Instead of being a cause of scorn, it should awaken our gratitude. 4. *And those features in this record which seem to some unworthy of its great mission, these really are of great service.* No doubt there is much of homeliness and of trivial and seemingly insignificant detail in this record. It is a very plain, prosaic book in many parts. But is not this a great boon? Had God's revelation of himself to us been accompanied by a blaze of splendour, with such manifestations of Divine power to the senses or to the intellect as some seem to desire, the revelation would have been lost in the record; no one would look at the picture, their attention being so much occupied with the setting. Hence it is good for us that we live so long after the times of the Bible. It is expedient for us that Christ has gone away. For in proportion to men's nearness to those times "events having God in them took a more forcible hold upon their mind than God in the events." The atmosphere of time is needed in order to our right viewing of the marvellous facts of the Bible.

IV. OUR ONE QUESTION IS—IS THE RECORD FAITHFUL? 1. *As to the facts themselves*—in their main substance and meaning. This question is quite apart from inspiration. Nothing but honesty and intelligence are asked for here. Of course, if any start with the assumption that the supernatural is not, and hence miracles are by their very nature impossible, and the belief of them absurd, such a one will refuse all credence to this record. But first let his assumption be proved ere doubt be thrown on either the honesty or the intelligence of the writers of the Bible. 2. *As to the interpretation and meaning of the facts they record.* "Just as on gazing at a picture of Raphael's we should rejoice to have at hand a companion who had familiarized himself with the spirit of the great artist and acquired an insight into his genius, to furnish us with such brief notices as might assist us to a comprehension of the profounder ideas expressed by the painting, for want of which it would lose very much of its intellectual meaning; so with the memoirs of Christ before us, as the spiritual revelation of God to our religious sense, we require, in order to adequate instruction and profit, the comments of . . . those who shall be qualified to point it out to our duller vision. What poets are to the natural exhibition of God in his works, these men will be to the moral exhibition of God in his Son." Now, that the sacred writers answer to this need is shown by the fact that they "commend the truth to every man's *conscience* in the sight of God." In this commendation to our conscience is the evidence that they have read aright the facts they record. And to this we may fearlessly appeal. We do not assert this of men's theologies and divinity schemes—too many of them outrage the conscience and trouble the moral sense; but we do assert it of the great verities of the faith, as taught in the Scriptures, and of the doctrines which the Bible as a whole plainly teaches.

"Within this ample volume lies
The mystery of mysteries.
Happiest they of human race
To whom their God has given grace
To read, to fear, to hope, to pray,
To lift the latch and force the way;
And better had they ne'er been born
Than read to doubt or read to scorn."

Cf. on this whole subject Miall's 'Bases of Belief.'—C.

Ver. 3.—"*It may be.*" We can understand the prophet thus speaking, but how can there be anything uncertain or contingent with God? And yet it is he who here speaks and says, "It may be." We are accustomed to say, "God knows all the past, and all the present, and all the future" (cf. Isa. xlvi. 9—11). Reason and Scripture alike

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seem to say that there can be nothing probable with God. But yet this is *his* word. Why does he thus speak? Perhaps—

I. BECAUSE THERE WAS NO LAW, NO DECREE, AGAINST THE PEOPLE'S REPENTANCE. He had made no such law, and man had not. There is no decree of reprobation.

II. IT MAY BE CONSISTENT, AFTER ALL, WITH THE TRUTH OF THINGS FOR GOD THUS TO SPEAK, THOUGH WE CANNOT SEE HOW. We infer certain conclusions from what we read and learn about God, and these conclusions seem to deny the possibility of there being any "it may be" with him. But we may be wrong after all, and the fact that he does thus speak lends to the suspicion that we are.

III. BECAUSE IT WOULD BE ILL FOR US WERE HE TO REVEAL THE CERTAINTIES OF THINGS. If they were to be such as we would desire, we should cease to labour for them. If otherwise, we should sit down in despair. But God desires us to labour and pray, and therefore hides the future from our eyes. Presumption and despair are both great evils; therefore to prevent them, God speaks after the manner of men, if not after the manner of God.

IV. BECAUSE HE INTENDS HIS "MAY BE" TO BECOME "SHALL BE." He would have us fellow-workers with him, and therefore he encourages our efforts, but hides from us that which would lead us to think them unnecessary. And probably the "may be" will become "shall be," though not at the time nor in the manner we expect. Let us, therefore, be ever cheered forward when God says, "It may be."—C.

Ver. 23.—*The indestructible Word.* The king's knife and fire did what they could to destroy the prophet's word, but with what result this chapter shows. The king was Jehoiakim; the prophet, Jeremiah; the word, his written prophecies. It was necessary that these should be written down. The army of Babylon was already in the land, and drawing near to the doomed city of Jerusalem, if they had not already captured it for the first time. There was no hope of successful resistance. Therefore, for a testimony when all that had been foretold came to pass, and for a solace and warning to that and to all coming generations, it was necessary that the twenty-three years' witness which the prophet had borne against that guilty nation should be put on record. Jeremiah was "shut up," whether by his own will, or the word of the Lord, or for fear of his enemies, we cannot certainly say; but Baruch, who seems to have been to Jeremiah as Timothy to Paul, was commanded to write these prophecies, and then, on the "fasting-day," to read them in the hearing of all the people. He did so. One of his hearers, alarmed and troubled, hastened away to the council of the princes, and told them what he had heard. Baruch was sent for, and declared again what he had before read to the people. The book was too terrible to show to the king; they therefore commanded that it and its author should be concealed, whilst they went in to the king to announce its fearful contents. A third time these prophecies were recited, but the king demanded that the book itself should be read to him. But when brought and the reading had begun, the angry king had no patience to listen beyond the first three or four leaves, but snatching it from the hand of the reader, he vented his rage upon it by cutting and hacking it with his knife, and then, to make short work of it, cast it, in spite of the horror-stricken entreaties of his princes, into the burning coals before him, where it was utterly consumed. Then he commands, but in vain, for "the Lord hid them," that Baruch and Jeremiah be arrested; but the Lord commands that these prophecies be written again, which was done, with the doom of the king added, and "beside them many like words." But this King Jehoiakim, in his dealing with the Word of God, and in its dealing with him, has had many successors. He is the type of—

I. THOSE WHO ARE IMPATIENT WITH THE WORD OF GOD. Jehoiakim only heard three or four leaves read, when he put a stop to the reading altogether in the foolish way we have seen. He would not hear the whole. Did any man ever destroy the Bible who knew it *wholly*? Many have thrown it into the fire who have heard or read a part only. The difficulty is in the "three or four leaves." How many stumble because they won't read on!

II. THOSE WHO BECOME VERY ANGRY WITH THE BIBLE. To men of this king's stamp the Bible has not one word of comfort, commendation, or hope. It is all full of thunder and storm. It is a dreadful book to the impenitent. No wonder that he snatches it

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from the reader's hand, and hacks at it with his knife, and then flings it into the blazing fire. Yes; be like this *king*, and you will do as he did, *and be done unto as he.*

III. THOSE WHO STRIVE TO DESTROY THE BIBLE. 1. *Some would only partly do this.* They admit a large amount of good in the book; they only desire to cut out what they think is otherwise. *Theologians* use their penknives. They practically put out of the Bible what makes against their favourite ideas. *Science* seems to be for ever at this miserable cutting. *Philosophy* is equally guilty; but *sin* is worst of all. It loves not the hard things the Bible will keep saying against it; therefore it would cut them out —only it cannot. 2. *There are those who would destroy the book altogether.* What Bible-burnings there have been! The histories of pagan and Romish persecutions are full of them. Are there none now? What is the difference between such burning and utter disregard of the book as too many are guilty of? If we trample it underfoot, in our hearts, our lips, our lives, how could burning it be any worse?

IV. THOSE WHO FIND THE BIBLE TOO STRONG FOR THEM. "O Galilæan, thou hast conquered!" said the Emperor Julian shortly before he died. And that has been the confession in regard to the Word of God on the part of all those who have tried to destroy it (ver. 30). The Word of God can neither be bound nor burned. It has been cut, cast into flames, proscribed, branded, corrupted, and treated with every conceivable form of opprobrium; but here it is to-day, a living and mighty factor in the lives of the foremost men and nations throughout the whole world. And the ungodly who practically seek to destroy it for themselves, *they* will find they cannot do this. Its truths will come back, its teachings reassert themselves, and will add beside "many like words."—C.

Ver. 26.—*The Lord's hidden ones.* "But the Lord hid them." He has many such, and in all manner of unthought-of places. If we read the history of the world aright, how continually God is bringing forth his hidden ones to render service to their fellow-men! "Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast *laid up* for them that fear thee!" Think of some of these hidden ones.

I. SUCH AS THE PROPHET HERE TOLD OF. And how God has hidden his people from the rage of men! "In the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me." Let the records of the martyr Churches in Rome, Switzerland, and wherever God's saints have been persecuted—let all these tell how he has often hidden his servants. Moses was hidden three months when an infant; then again with Jethro in Midian afterwards. How God hid David again and again from Saul!

II. THOSE DESTINED FOR GREAT SERVICE. How often, when a Church seems to have been brought to its lowest, God raises up some one who is the means of reviving it! David amongst the sheepfolds. Gideon and the judges. Our Lord at Nazareth. In all unlikeliest places God has his hidden ones, whom in due time he will manifest to the surprise and joy of his Church.

III. SUCH AS ARE NOT YET IN THE VISIBLE CHURCH. Amongst those whom we deem outside the Church, God has his chosen, whom one day he will call. Who, looking on the murderers of St. Stephen, would have thought that amongst them God had one of his choicest servants? This is the dispensation, not of universal conversion—that is to come—but of calling out those who shall be the instruments of the universal ingathering. God is blessing his Church *that* "his way may be known upon earth," etc. We are therefore to despair of no nation, community, class, family, or neighbourhood. In all God has his hidden ones.

"O grace, into unlikeliest hearts
It is thy wont to come."

IV. THE BLESSED DEAD. There is to be a manifestation of the sons of God. Meanwhile their "life is hid with Christ in God." "Wherefore comfort one another with these words."—C.

Ver. 28.—*Disaster not defeat.* What dismay must have filled the minds of those who saw the book destroyed, and of those who heard of it—Baruch, Jeremiah, and others!

I. IT WAS GREAT DISASTER. The book was most precious. See its gracious intent. See how it had already moved many for good. What might not be expected from it?

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II. AND IT SEEMED IRRETRIEVABLE. There was no copy of it kept. No human memory could reproduce it. The word had not sunk into the hearts of the people so as to render it no longer needed.

III. BUT THE DISASTER WAS NOT DEFEAT. God interposed, commanded the prophet to write again, enabled him to do so, supplied him with many more like words.

IV. BY MEANS OF IT MORE GOOD WAS WROUGHT. What endorsement of the Word did its remarkable reproduction supply! How it would show the vanity of all human rage against the Divine will! How the faith of the godly would be strengthened, whilst the daring of the wicked would be rebuked!

V. AND THIS INSTANCE IS BUT ONE OUT OF MYRIADS MORE. Read the history of the Church, and see how perpetually out of seeming disaster God has brought real good and increased good. And so in our own personal histories, providential and spiritual alike. "Trust thou in the Lord at all times."—C.

Ver. 3.—*God's eye to every possibility.* I. THE THING WHICH GOD GREATLY DESIRES. That man may repent, thus enabling him to forgive. He ever has his eyes on the ways of evil men, noticing the slightest sign of their weariness in them and disposition to leave them. This is always a thing to be suspected and prepared for. That any man should suddenly become uneasy and hesitating in the midst of evil courses is nothing wonderful when we consider that man was made for goodness and holiness. Thus what else should we look for than frequent expressions of desire on the part of God that man should again be found in the right way?

II. GOD LEAVES NOTHING UNDONE TO BRING THIS ABOUT. There is something even touching about this word, "it may be." As if it were allowed that probabilities all pointed in one unfavourable direction, but still not one of them was such a certainty that the contrary possibility should be excluded. As the common proverb says, "While there's life there's hope." Every instance of a rejected appeal and an abused prophet lessens the probability, but it does not destroy the possibility. God goes on sending his prophets. Each man comes with his own personality, his own peculiar emphasis, and thus with evermore the same message there is variety both in the messenger and the form of his message. And at last, when the messenger gets shut up, his words are written down and transmitted by another. We cannot get rid of the Word of God. There are a thousand channels to the heart of man, and the violent stoppage of some may only result in the enlargement and efficacy of others.

III. THERE IS AN EXAMPLE FOR US IN GOSPEL WORK. Scripture shows us God using many ways in trying to get at the human heart. Surely the great principle in this matter is that every way is right if it be not wrong in itself. We must not do evil that good may come; but we must be all things to all men that we may save some.

IV. THERE MAY BE ADDED GUILT TO THOSE REJECTING THE GOSPEL. It was one of the worst elements in the guilt of Israel that it had been indifferent to so many appeals and such various ones. God did not send these people into exile upon one refusal or even upon a few. There was sufficient intimation of his demands and his designs. And we may take it that there always is sufficient intimation. With the constant extension of gospel effort and the wider diffusion of Bibles, tracts, and all sorts of printed agencies, we may say that each generation gets more of light than the one before it. Indeed, we may lay it down as a general principle that when all the opportunities of every human being are summed up, it will be found that he is without any excuse for pleading ignorance or doubt as to God's demands.—Y.

Ver. 6.—"*Things new and old.*" I. THE OLD. The message itself was old. It had been proclaimed before in parts and on different occasions. There was not, indeed, opportunity for anything new. The audience also was to some extent old. But then let it always be understood that God speaks according to the necessities of the case, not according to the itching ear of man ever clamouring for novelty and relief from *ennui*. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." There may come a time in every man's life, when it is not the new but the old and neglected or misunderstood that will prove the necessity of the soul.

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II. THE NEW. 1. *The messenger.* Not Jeremiah, but Baruch; not a prophet, but a prophet's deputy; not a word spoken, but a word read; not a part of Jeremiah's utterances, but the whole, so that people might have it brought home to them how much they had neglected. Old truth appears in new framework and new relations, so that it may arrest people who have become indifferent to the old associations. There was a time when Jeremiah's face was fresh, and curiosity would make people stop to hear what this babbler might say. But after hearing him often, they ceased to heed him. Then Baruch comes forward, and words that were an exact repetition of words heard before got a flavour of novelty. 2. *The occasion.* The fasting-day. Read Isa. lviii. carefully to discover the avowed purpose and yet utter uselessness of the fasting-day in Israel. The people met together to acknowledge their sins, to punish their bodies, to please God, to avert his displeasure. It might, therefore, be assumed that then, if ever, they were in a state prepared to listen to the volume of one great prophet's utterance. If anything was to be got out of seizing the best available occasion, then surely it was to be got here. Thus we learn how occasion adds responsibility to utterance; responsibility both for him who speaks and those who hear. These people were not stopped in the street or the market; their homes were not invaded by prophetic messages; they had no pretence for saying they were interfered with. They put themselves in Baruch's way. His work, as reader of Jeremiah's prophecies, was in exact harmony with what ought to have been the feelings and desires of his audience. 3. *The audience.* That audience, as we have said above, was to some extent old, but to some extent also it would be new. A new message to some people in Jerusalem, and quite new doubtless to the bulk of those who came from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem. The whole proceeding helps us to see how valuable the public reading of the Scriptures may be. For old as they are, with so much in them that savours of vanished ages and customs, they have, nevertheless, to do with perennial wants, miseries, and possibilities.—Y.

Ver. 23.—*Burning the Word of the Lord.* I. THE KING'S MOTIVES IN THIS ACT. Perhaps he was not conscious of any distinct set of motives. He was but a despot, and despots are in many things like spoiled children; they act not from any clear reason, good or bad, so much as from the caprice of the moment. If this act had been a singularity of Jehoiakim's, there would have been less need to attend to it, but unhappily it only illustrates a whole series of acts by those occupying stations of power among men. Putting Jeremiah in prison, burning Baruch's roll, slaying the innocents at Bethlehem, putting apostles in prison, and all the long list of martyrdoms,—what are these but the same essential act all through? Jehoiakim would have been in full sympathy with Roman Catholic priests burning the Scriptures in translations understood of the common people. Jehoiakim was a man buttressed with privileges, pampered with privileges; and here he had a document forced upon his ears which contained assertions by no means compatible with the continuance of his privileges. And there was one thing he could do—he could get rid of the offensive document. He stands before us a great example of those—and how many there are!—who, in their eagerness to get rid of an unpleasant subject, take the first means that comes to hand for getting rid of it.

II. LOOK AT THE ACT IN THE LIGHT OF HISTORY. Jehoiakim burnt Baruch's roll, but he did not destroy Jeremiah's prophecies; nor did he nullify the truth of Jeremiah's predictions; nor did he stop other prophetic utterances. If Jehoiakim can, he may burn, not only Baruch's roll, but Baruch and Jeremiah as well. Suppose this done; yet Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and probably many more, of whose words we know nothing, have to be reckoned with. This is the peculiar folly of men like Jehoiakim, that they perform acts monumental of their folly. Jehoiakim might have quietly said, "If these words are true, then we cannot make them false; and if they be false, time will show their falsity, and bring to shame both the dictator and the writer of them." Instead of acting thus with dignified endurance, Jehoiakim, in burning the roll, challenged the attention not only of his own people but of all ages. He did what there was no sort of need for him to do. It may be said—Why not apply the same line of remark to Luther burning the pope's bull? To this the answer is obvious, that Luther's act was a message of renunciation, a summons of the papacy's

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bondslaves to freedom, an act of sublime trust in God. Looked at from the point of view given in the present, it is seen to have been an inspiration. But what did Jehoiakim's act amount to? Only empty bravado. He had nothing to fear from men. Luther did something when he burnt the bull. Jehoiakim did nothing but proclaim his own shame, and advertise the glory of that God over against whose throne his paltry throne had been set up.—Y.

Ver. 26.—*Jehovah hiding his servants.* I. THE NEED OF SUCH INTERPOSITION. Baruch and Jeremiah had already been told by the princes to hide (ver. 19); but what was any effort purely of their own likely to avail? Indeed, it is only as we appreciate the uselessness of a purely human effort for this purpose that we shall see the need of a Divine intervention. God does not mean miracles and special providences to do the work of man's prudence. But when it is made evident that man can do little or nothing, then God's action appears manifest and admonitory. It may be too much to say that this action of God was intended as an answer to Jehoiakim's audacity in burning the roll; but it was an answer nevertheless.

II. THE MANNER OF THE INTERPOSITION. This is left untold. Either Jeremiah could not explain the manner of his hiding, or it was purposely left unexplained to heighten the impressiveness of the fact. It may have been through a marvellous combination of human kindness and sympathy, such as showed a Divine directing hand; or there may have been miracle. God is an effectual hider. How much there is hidden away in the very things we see, so that knowledge may be kept from all but the humble and obedient! God could not be the revealer that he is, unless he were also an effectual hider. The great end was gained if people of the right sort in Jerusalem were made to feel that this hiding was in no sort the work of man, and could only be explained by the intervention of a higher power.

III. THE RESULT OF THE INTERPOSITION. Jeremiah was hidden and preserved because his work was not yet done. His words had to be put down in writing; and it is interesting to notice that the second copy was an improvement on the first. All that was in the first was also in the second, and many like words were added. God never does wonders for the mere sake of doing wonders. When he hides his servants, or delivers them from prison, it is soon made manifest that he had a purpose in view. We have to remember this in reading such a book as the Acts of the Apostles. Stephen is left to be stoned to death, while Peter has an angel to take him out of prison. The fact was Stephen had the greatest work of his life to do in the hour of his death. "Man is immortal till his work is done." Whatsoever God has clearly given us to do, we must go on with it boldly, yet prudently, sure that he will take care of us who hid Jeremiah in the hour of his danger.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Nothing worthy of relation appears to have happened to Jeremiah till the latter period of the reign of Zedekiah. The first two verses of this chapter form the transition. The embassy to Jeremiah mentioned in ver. 3 took place after the temporary withdrawal of the Chaldeans from Jerusalem.

Ver. 1.—**Coniah**; *i.e.* Jehoiachin (see on ch. xxii. 24). **Whom Nebuchadrezzar . . . made king.** Zedekiah, not Jehoiachin, is referred to (see 2 Kings xxiv. 17).

Ver. 3.—**And Zedekiah the king sent.** This was Zedekiah's second embassy to Jeremiah. His request on the former occasion had been for a prophecy; on the present it was for an "effectual fervent prayer," such as Hezekiah's embassy asked of Isaiah (Isa. xxxvii. 6). But the issue was to be very different from that in the case of Sennacherib's invasion! **Jehucal.** The same man appears in ch. xxxviii. 1, among those who brought about the imprisonment of Jeremiah. **Zephaniah.** The high priest's deputy, mentioned again in ch. xxi. 1; xxix. 25; lii. 24.

Ver. 4.—**Now Jeremiah came in and went out,** etc. Had he been a prisoner, an embassy of high officials could not, with propriety, have been sent to him (comp. ver. 17; ch. xxxviii. 14).

Ver. 5.—**Then Pharaoh's army,** etc.; rather, *And Pharaoh's army had,* etc.; as a further description of the circumstances

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under which the embassy was sent. The withdrawal of the Chaldeans seemed to offer a gleam of hope. The Pharaoh referred to was the Hophra of the Jews, the Apries of Herodotus, the Uah-ab-ra of the monuments. His interference was useless; indeed, Hophra was one of the most unfortunate of the Egyptian kings (see ch. xliv. 30).

Ver. 10.—Even if the Jews had defeated the whole Chaldean army, and there remained but *a group of sorely wounded men*, these in their weakness would be enabled to carry out God's sure purpose. But **wounded men** hardly brings out the force of the Hebrew; the word rendered "men" is emphatic, and expresses paucity of numbers, and that rendered "wounded" is, literally, *pierced through*.

Ver. 11.—**For fear of**, etc.; rather, *because of*.

Ver. 12.—As soon as communication with the outside world was possible, Jeremiah took the opportunity of going to his native country, to obtain something or other which he could only obtain "thence." The Authorized Version says that his object was **to separate himself thence**. But (1) the rendering is linguistically untenable; and (2) the assumed object is incongruous with the circumstances and character of Jeremiah, who was neither inclined to seek safety in isolation nor had any motive at present for doing so. The only safe rendering is, *to claim his share thence*. Whether there was just then a reallotment of communal lands must be left undecided; this would, however, be the most plausible hypothesis, if we could be sure that the present was a sabbatical year. The additional words, **in the midst of the people**, would then acquire a special significance. The "people" would be the representatives of families who had an equal right to allotments with Jeremiah.

Ver. 13.—**The gate of Benjamin**; *i.e.* the gate looking northwards towards Benjamin (comp. ch. xx. 2; xxxviii. 7; Zech. xiv. 10). It appears to be the same as the gate of Ephraim (2 Kings xiv. 13; Neh. viii. 16). **Thou fallest away**, etc. Perhaps an allusion to Jeremiah's declaration (ch. xxi. 9) that "he that falleth away to the Chaldeans . . . he shall live."

Ver. 15.—**The princes were wroth with Jeremiah.** As Graf has pointed out, the princes, who had evinced their respect for Jeremiah on former occasions (ch. xxvi., xxxvi.), had probably shared the captivity of Jehoiachin; Zedekiah's "princes" would be of a lower origin and type, and ready (like the judges in the French "terror") to accept any charge against an unpopular person without proper examination. **The house of Jonathan the scribe.** "Scribe," *i.e.* one of the secretaries of state. The house of Jonathan seems to have been specially adapted for a prison, as the next verse shows. Chardin, the old traveller, remarks, "The Eastern prisons are not public buildings erected for that purpose, but a part of the house in which the criminal judges dwell. As the governor and provost of a town, or the captain of the watch, imprison such as are accused in their own houses, they set apart a canton of them for that purpose when they are put into these offices, and choose for the jailor the most proper person they can find of their domestics" (Chardin).

Ver. 16.—**Into the dungeon, and into the cabins.** The former word undoubtedly implies an underground excavation. The latter is of more uncertain signification. It most probably means "vaults;" but it may mean "curved posts"—something analogous to stocks (see on ch. xx. 2).

Ver. 17.—Meantime the Chaldean army has returned, and reinvested the city. Zedekiah, in his anxiety, sends for Jeremiah privately to his palace. **Thou shalt be delivered**, etc. (comp. ch. xxxii. 3, 4; xxxiv. 2, 3).

Ver. 21.—**Court of the prison**; rather, *court of the watch* (as ch. xxxii. 2). **A piece of bread**; literally, *a circle* (i.e. round cake) *of bread*. This is mentioned elsewhere in descriptions of poverty (1 Sam. ii. 36; Prov. vi. 26); but as the ancient Oriental bread was not our delicate white bread, it was a real "staff of life." The Syrian peasants still eat cakes of coarse meal, of about the thickness of parchment, and equal in size to a large plate (Orelli's 'Travels'). **The bakers' street.** Probably the several trades were confined to special quarters and streets. In Cairo each trade has still its own bazaar (saddlers, carpets, hardware, goldsmiths, sweetmeats, etc.).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Prayer without obedience.* Though Zedekiah will give no heed to the message from God to him through Jeremiah, he is not the less anxious to secure the prophet's intercession with God for deliverance from approaching calamity. The king illustrates the too common case of those people who will fly to the protection of religion in trouble, though they neglect all its obligations of holiness and of service.

I. RELIGION REQUIRES OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WILL. It is not all on one side. God speaks

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to us, and speaks words of command as well as words of consolation. It is, therefore, our duty to hear and obey. 1. *Ignorance* is no excuse, if we wilfully refuse to hear the truth. Zedekiah and his servants did not obey because they did not "hearken," *i.e. would* not hearken. We are not responsible for failing through not knowing our duty if we could not know it. But if we could, it was our duty to ascertain it. The soldier who puts aside the despatch of his commander unopened, and then acts contrary to the orders contained in it is, of course, as guilty as if he did so knowingly; for it was his duty to read the orders he received before going into action. 2. The *example* of those who have done wrong before is no excuse. Zedekiah followed the example of Jehoiakim. But he knew it was wrong. He had seen the miserable end of his predecessor's reign. He should have taken warning from this. But men are more inclined to imitate the crimes of the wicked than to learn the lesson of their fate. 3. *High position* does not mitigate guilt, but, on the contrary, it aggravates it. Zedekiah led the people with him in his rejection of God's message through Jeremiah. He knew what influence he exerted, and he ought to have been the more careful that it was not wrongly used.

II. PRAYER WITHOUT OBEDIENCE IS VAIN. Zedekiah seeks Jeremiah's prayers, but in vain. It is not necessary, indeed, that our obedience should be faultless before God will hearken to a single prayer. If this were the case, no prayer of man's could be heard. But it is requisite that we should repent of our past disobedience, and should be unfeignedly desirous of obeying God in the future. For otherwise our purely self-seeking religion is an insult to God. Besides, we cannot hope to change the essential principles of God's action by our prayer. If it is his will to chastise us for our sin, he cannot change his will so long as we remain unchanged in conduct. But when we turn from the sin which deserves the penalty, it may be possible for God to modify his treatment of us in answer to our prayer of submission. Therefore it is so necessary that we should pray through the intercession of Christ. Then, though our obedience is still most imperfect, if we desire to do better, Christ is our Representative and the promise of our future obedience, and therefore his good merits go to plead with God to answer our prayer offered in his Name.

Ver. 9.—*Self-deception.* "Deceive not yourselves."

I. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SELF-DECEPTION. As fallible beings, surrounded with mystery, and often beset by illusions we are likely to fall into unavoidable mistakes for which we cannot be held responsible. There are other errors which we might avoid if we took the right means for ascertaining the facts; but from indifference, or from indolence, or from unwillingness to see an unpleasant truth that is already half suspected, we neglect these means, and thus land ourselves in a delusion. This is self-deception. 1. It may be *conscious and deliberate.* The very notion is paradoxical. But we are not logical machines; our belief is often most inconsistent. Our will and feelings have great influence over our convictions. We rarely contemplate things in the white light of truth. And in so far as we permit our vision to be blinded by passion or distorted by prejudice, we may deceive ourselves. 2. This self-deception may be *unconscious.* Yet it is culpable if we voluntarily neglect the means of seeing things as they are. We may not know that we are deceiving ourselves. But we must know that we are not doing all we can to avoid delusions.

II. THE OCCASIONS OF SELF-DECEPTION. 1. These may be found in the *superficial appearance* of events. The outward seeming does not correspond with the inward verity. The temptation is to rest satisfied with the mere appearance and assume that it is an index of the underlying fact. Thus when the Chaldean army retreated from before Jerusalem at the advance of Pharaoh-Hophra, Zedekiah was ready to believe that his revolt was successful. 2. Occasions may be found in *our own inclinations.* Zedekiah wished to see no more of the Chaldean army, and "the wish was father to the thought." 3. They may be found in *preconceived notions.* We expect the facts to verify our opinions, and we contrive to make them do so by ignoring what will not agree with them, and selecting for consideration only what is favourable. All this may be traced in the history of religious delusions. People blind themselves to the thought of future judgment because, on the surface of life and for the present, all goes well. They are too ready to form their creed according to their inclination, dropping out unpleasant ideas as though there were no dark truths in existence. They go to the

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Bible for confirmation of their own "views" rather than for instruction, and, if need be, correction of them, and of course they have eyes only to see those texts which make for this confirmation. Note: Jeremiah tried to deliver the Jews from self-deception. A Divine revelation is necessary to save us from religious self-deception. The Bible aims at this result as well as at enlightening our ignorance.

III. THE EVIL OF SELF-DECEPTION. 1. It is *disloyal to truth.* It is our duty not to rest in a delusion. The obligation of truthfulness reaches to our thinking as well as to our speaking. 2. It is *dangerous to our own souls.* Facts remain unchanged whatever fanciful notions we may weave about them till they are quite unrecognizable, and when the time for action comes, they will act as they are, not as we think them. The careless, who decline to consider a future judgment, are not the less amenable to it. Those people who have sought refuge in the Roman Catholic Church from the torment of doubt have not done anything to settle the facts about which they were troubled; like the ostrich, who hides his head in a bush, they have quieted their doubt by turning from it; but if it was well grounded originally, it must be ultimately confirmed to their undoing.

Ver. 10.—*The irresistible will of God.* I. THE FACT. The Jews were ready to believe that Egypt was a match for Babylon, and to hope that through the conflict of these two powers they might regain their liberty. Even if they were justified in thinking so from a calculation of the material resources of these great empires, Jeremiah reminded them that there were other considerations to be taken into account before the result could be predicted. It was the will of God that Babylon should conquer Jerusalem. Therefore, if the Chaldean army were reduced to a disorganized group of wounded men, Jerusalem would still succumb. The Jews had found that, while they were faithful to God, they were strong against hordes of enemies. They were to learn that when they had put themselves against God, the position was reversed, and the weakest foe could overthrow them. So it was true against them, as it had been on their side, that "a little one should chase a thousand." It has been the mistake of kings and of peoples to leave out of their calculations the chief factor of their history—to forget that God is ever working out his will through their cross purposes. Do we not make the same mistake in our private lives? If God is almighty, it follows beyond question that he must accomplish what he purposes, though to us there seems no means of doing so, and though he neither reveals the means nor in most cases the end, working them out "deep in unfathomable mines." Still, we know some things concerning God's will and the way he works it out; *e.g.* he always wills what is just and good; material events are largely beyond our control and under the influence of providence; moral influences count for much in history, and these are directly affected by the spiritual relations of God with the minds of men.

II. THE RELATION OF THIS FACT TO FATALISM AND TO NECESSARIANISM. 1. The relation of it to *fatalism.* It must be distinguished from materialistic fatalism, which denies all will in nature; from pagan fatalism, which sets the decrees of the fates above the power of the gods; from Mohammedan fatalism, which ascribes every event to the will of God, but regards that will as the unfettered choice of an irresponsible despot. The irresistible power in providence as revealed in the Bible is a will, a Divine will, a holy will, that always works out purposes of justice, purity, and love. 2. The relation of this fact to *necessarianism.* If God's will is irresistible what room is there for our will? Must not that be necessarily bound by his will? This question arises from confusing two phases of the will of God. The phrase, "will of God," represents two things—(1) what God purposes to do himself, and (2) what he desires us to do. The first governs his actions, the second inspires his Law. Now, it is the first that is irresistible; the second is plainly resistible. All sin is nothing but man's rebellion against God's will, *i.e.* God's will in the second sense—what he wishes us to do. This is really no contradiction to what we know of the first will of God—what he purposes to do himself—because in his almighty will of action he chooses to give us free-will containing the power of resisting his Law. Still, God's will to act must harmonize with his will in his Law for our conduct. If we resist the second will, we shall find ourselves in conflict with the first, against which all resistance is futile. Therefore true wisdom will lead us to do God's will where we are free in relation to it,

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that we may find ourselves in agreement with God's will where opposition means only failure and ruin.

Vers. 11—21.—*Jeremiah imprisoned as a traitor.* I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO THE IMPRISONMENT. Whatever interpretation we are to set on the ambiguous passage which gives the reason for Jeremiah's attempt to leave Jerusalem (ver. 12)—whether it were to escape from the city, or to abandon a work that appeared to be fruitless for work in the country districts, or to take a possession at a redistribution of land in the sabbatical year, or to claim his share as a priest,—it is difficult to acquit him of all blame for allowing personal considerations to move him from what he ought to have known was his post. At the best, his conduct was open to misinterpretation. Even when we mean no wrong it is our duty to avoid the appearance of evil. Still, we must not be harsh in condemning the prophet. A servant of God has his natural human rights and the civil rights which he shares with his fellow-citizens. People are very unjust in charging good men with worldliness for exercising those rights, and in assuming that religious people are to be blamed for self-interested conduct which in itself is irreproachable and is acknowledged to be so amongst men under ordinary circumstances. We are not surprised, however, to find the prophet accused of treason. He had frequently advised submission to Babylon. It was now hastily assumed that he and his friends were about to secure their own escape from the horrors of a siege by basely deserting their fellow-citizens. The best men are liable to the vilest accusations. The world holds no man above suspicion. Christ was accused of a great crime. Therefore we should learn patience under similar inflictions, remembering that God knows all, and that it is far better to suffer unjustly than to be unpunished but guilty. We should also learn to avoid the mistake of the Jews. People are too much inclined to put the worst construction on a doubtful action. "Charity thinketh no evil."

II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES FOLLOWING THE IMPRISONMENT. Jeremiah had been harshly treated—struck by the courtiers of Zedekiah and thrust into a dungeon. There God met him (ver. 17), as God repeatedly visited him, in prison. His life's work was not stayed by outward restraints. That must have been some consolation to the prophet. A devoted servant of God is more concerned about his mission than about his personal comfort. Apprehending a return of danger from the Chaldean army, the weak Zedekiah sent and consulted Jeremiah secretly. The prophet's reply was bold and clear (ver. 17). Never had he been more definite or more concise. What courage and fidelity to truth for a prisoner thus to address a king! Having delivered his message, Jeremiah proceeded to plead his own cause. How many of us reverse the order, putting self-interest first and crowding other interests into the background! Jeremiah was favourably heard by the king, and his condition considerably ameliorated. He did not suffer this time for his fidelity. It is fair to note that faithfulness does not always lead to martyrdom. In the *end* it is always safer to be brave and true than to play the coward's part.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 2, 3.—(*Vide* ch. xxi. 1, 2.)—M.

Vers. 5—10.—*Hopes that betray.* The king, continuing in his rebellion against God as well as against Nebuchadnezzar, invoked the aid of Pharaoh-Necho. At the tidings of his advance the Chaldeans raised the siege, but only that they might defeat the Egyptians, and return again in greater force and fury.

I. THE NATURE OF THESE HOPES. 1. *They are based upon human means alone.* 2. *They arise from following the dictates of our own will and wisdom.*

II. HOW THEY BETRAY. 1. *They are full of promise, and gain confidence.* 2. *They must fail,* (1) because they are inadequate to the real need, and (2) they are opposed to the will of God. 3. *They spiritually ruin.* They lead us first to ignore and then to resist the will of God. In this alone is our welfare secured. For although the first expression and demand of that will be gloomy and severe, the end of it to the obedient is peace and salvation (1 Pet. i. 3—9).—M.

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Ver. 10.—*God's purpose independent of means.* The declaration of the certainty of the judgments upon Judah is absolute. They are not to be avoided by any human effort or apparent success. The soldiers of Chaldea, although they were to be wounded ("thrust through" equivalent to "dead"?), would still avail for the work they had to do, and would be raised again to do it.

I. THE LESSON. A twofold one, viz.: 1. *The inevitableness of the Divine will,* whether it be to destroy or to save. 2. *God's independence of human means.* He can save by "many or by few." He is declared able "of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." It pleased him by "the foolishness of preaching" to save many, etc. (1) The sinner in rebellion against God, however great his outward success and however feeble the opposition to him, has reason to fear. It is an easy thing for his Maker to crush him. It will not require a *great* instrumentality. Herod was eaten of worms. (2) The Christian worker should rejoice and be encouraged. Every true word or work will have its effect. He must succeed, however insignificant his company or his means.

II. THE TYPE. The ghostly army that was to "burn the city with fire" represents the mighty power of God to create his agents, and symbolizes the *death and resurrection of Christ.* It is the dead Christ who is raised again to fulfil the will of God in judgment and salvation.—M.

Vers. 11—16.—*The servant of God accused of treason.* This attempt of Jeremiah's to go out of Jerusalem, whatever its special purpose may have been (as to this there is great diversity of view), was at once suspected of being treasonable, or, at any rate, it was made an occasion of accusing and punishing him. His asseverations were not listened to, but quickly and with much anger he was consigned to a loathsome prison, where he languished for many days. This teaches that—

I. THOSE WHO ARE FAITHFUL TO GOD WILL FREQUENTLY BE SUSPECTED OF THE WORST MOTIVES. The immediate purpose to be served by going out from Jerusalem was innocent enough, viz. mere resort to the country as safer than the city, or to take possession of his inheritance in Benjamin. No effort was made at concealment, it was done "in the midst of the people." Yet he was accused of being about to "fall away [desert] to the Chaldeans." It would appear as if the prophet's persistent declarations of the success of the Chaldean arms and the downfall of Judah were attributed to his sympathy with the enemy. Many of the greatest servants of God have had similar experiences. Christ himself was accused of the worst intentions against the Jewish nation.

II. HOW IS THIS? 1. *Because the natural mind fails to understand the things of God.* The motive power or central principle is so diverse, or the means employed are so peculiar, that the real benevolence of intention is not perceived. When Christians remember how hard it is for even themselves to justify God's ways, they ought to expect that others not expressly taught of him will fail thoroughly to apprehend their drift. The policy of the Divine life and service, even in its plainest duties and appointments, is surrounded with mystery; its wisdom is not of this world. It is often hard for those who are condemned by Christ's ministers to realize that the denunciations to which they are subjected do not spring from personal enmity. The greatest efforts ought, therefore, to be made to prove how good and loving the spirit is in which words of Christian rebuke are uttered. And the whole conduct of believers should be careful and blameless. "Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matt. x. 16). 2. *The natural mind is predisposed against truth and goodness.*—M.

Vers. 2—4.—"*Give us of your oil.*" Here we have King Zedekiah, his servants, and his people, asking the prayers of the prophet of God, whose word of counsel and warning they had all along despised. The verses remind us of the parable of the ten virgins; for, as there, the foolish say unto the wise, "Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out," so here the foolish king and people entreat the aid of the wise servant of God when, as the midnight cry came to those virgins, so the dread judgment of God came to them. "Pray now unto the Lord our God for us," say they who had refused to listen when he spoke to them from the Lord their God. Note—

I. HOW GRIEVOUSLY WICKED THE PEOPLE HAD BEEN. (Cf. ver. 2.) It was with them

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as with the family of the rich man told of in Luke xvi. He, being in torments, thought of his five brethren who were all of them living in sin. There, as here, there were none righteous. And so with Sodom and Gomorrah.

II. YET HOW VERY ANXIOUS THEY WERE FOR THE PROPHET'S PRAYERS. Ver. 3, "Pray now," etc. Reasons of this were: 1. They had waked up to the conviction that the prophet's message was true. 2. They were in sore peril, and knew not how to help themselves. 3. They knew that the prophet had power with God. 4. They felt they could not go to God in prayer themselves. How much of the asking for the prayers of God's ministers on the part of those who are on their death-bed is owing to like causes!

III. HOW USELESS SUCH PRAYERS ARE. Did the prayer of Dives do any good? or of the five foolish virgins? or those of the prophet, for we may suppose that he did pray? Now, the reasons of their uselessness are such as these: 1. To have granted them would have defeated God's purpose in regard to his people. That purpose was to purify them, to separate them from their sins. But they did not wish when they asked these prayers to be severed from sin, only to be relieved of trouble. But such desire could not be granted; therefore God held them down to the consequences of their sin. 2. Their request was an insult to God. Such men are well described in Mrs. H. W. B. Stowe's book, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' where one of them, Haley, is thus spoken to by a comrade: "After all, what's the odds between me and you? 'Tain't that you care one bit more or have a bit more feelin'; it's clean, sheer, dog meanness, wanting to cheat the devil and save your own skin. Don't I see through it? And your 'gettin' religion,' as you call it, arter all, is too p'isin mean for any crittur; run up a bill with the devil all your life, and then sneak out when pay-time comes! Boh!" Is there not a vast amount of this meanness? Its despicableness is only equalled by its uselessness. 3. It would make God the minister of sin.

CONCLUSION. Learn, unless there be true repentance, neither our own prayers nor those of other people, though they be the greatest saints of God, will avail us anything. Even coming to Christ apart from repentance will fail us. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit," etc.—C.

Ver. 5.—*Building on the sand.* Such was the conduct of the people who encouraged themselves to hope from the withdrawal of the armies of Babylon from around Jerusalem that now they were delivered for good and all, and had no further cause for fear. They misread facts, interpreting them according to their desires rather than according to the truth. It was true that the army of Egypt was advancing and that of Babylon retreating. But, as the onflux of the wave does not prove that the tide is coming in nor its reflux that the tide is going out, so this temporary advance and retreat told of no permanent results or of what the real issue should be. But yet they thought it did. It was a case of building on the sands of unwarranted hope rather than on the rock of the Word of God. Hope ever tells a flattering tale, but never so much so as when she promises peace to those to whom God has said there shall be no peace. Now, concerning such building on the sand, note—

I. THE FOUNDATION. There are many such; *e.g.*: 1. Reasonings from the observed prosperity of the wicked. 2. The assertions or suggestions of the sin-loving heart: that there is no God; if there be, he is too merciful to punish sin; repentance at last will do; the efficacy of sacraments, etc. These are all of them instances of 1. 3. The slow-footedness of God's judgments. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are steadfastly set in them to do evil." And God *is* long-suffering, not willing that any should perish.

II. THE STRUCTURES RAISED THEREUPON. They are often characterized by much material comfort. Worldly prosperity is not too weighty for them. Great freedom from anxiety, "Not in trouble as other men are." They are very attractive, and seem to be the abodes of true happiness. Mirth, festivity, and song abound in them often far more than in those which are built upon the rock.

III. THE OVERTHROW. This always comes. It came in the instance given here. The armies of Babylon did come back. It may come in this life. There are warnings of it every day. But if not now, then in the great day of judgment. And this overthrow will make us full of sorrow according to the days wherein we have never been afflicted, and the years wherein, as we have thought, we have seen no evil.

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CONCLUSION. Read the events of God's providence, not by the light of thy sin-loving heart, but by the light of God's sure Word, of God's Spirit within thee, and of God's not partial but complete dealing with men, taking in the whole of life, and, if needs be, eternity also. "Be not deceived."—C.

Ver. 9.—"*Be not deceived.*" There was ground for this exhortation, and there is still. Then as now—

I. VERY MANY WERE DECEIVED.

II. APPEARANCES WERE DECEPTIVE.

III. NONE COULD CLAIM EXEMPTION FROM THE POSSIBILITY OF BEING DECEIVED.

IV. THERE WAS A TRAITOR WITHIN THE CAMP. Their hearts wished that to be true which they therefore thought to be true.

V. TO BE DECEIVED IS TO BE PLUNGED IN THE UTTERMOST OF SORROW.

VI. WE NEED NOT BE. There is One who says, "I will guide thee with my counsel."—C.

Ver. 13.—*Falsely accused.* Our Lord Jesus said, "It is sufficient for the servant that he be as his Master." Now, as he was falsely accused, so here we find his servant likewise. Note—

I. TO BE FALSELY ACCUSED IS THE COMMON LOT OF GOD'S PEOPLE. How many instances we have!—Abel, Joseph, Moses, David, etc. Because of such slanders the psalmist said, "All men are liars." And here the Prophet Jeremiah, having no thought of deserting his countrymen, is nevertheless accused of so doing. And to-day the world is ever ready with its slander. It avows that all the godly are but hypocrites, knaves, or fools. With what eagerness does it fasten upon the faults of a good man! How ready to take up an accusation against him!

II. HOW IS IT TO BE ACCOUNTED FOR? We reply: 1. Men of the world do not understand the principles on which the godly act. Hence what they do not understand they misrepresent. 2. They know their own motives, and attribute the like to the godly. They act from purely worldly motives, and hence they conclude godly men do the same. 3. They hate religion, and therefore are always ready to revile it. 4. It is "a comfort to Sodom" to think that the godly are no better than themselves after all. But—

III. HOW IS IT TO BE DEALT WITH? 1. *Sometimes by silence.* Silence leaves opportunity for and suggests reflection. How often of our Lord is it said, "He answered not a word" (cf. John xiii.)! 2. *Sometimes by indignant denial.* Thus the prophet acted here; ver. 14, "It is false," etc. They might have known, and probably did know, how false their accusation was. Where there is great and true indignation felt at being thought capable of a given crime, that feeling may often be shown; often, indeed, it ought to be, as when (1) the honour of God is concerned; (2) the good of his Church; (3) what is shameful as well as sinful is charged against us. 3. *Sometimes by showing the necessary untruthfulness of the accusation.* This also our Lord did, as when they charged him with being in league with Beelzebub. 4. *Sometimes by committing it all to God.* Of our Lord it is said, "When he was reviled, he reviled not again, . . . but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." 5. *Sometimes by showing the motive of the false accusation.* As when our Lord likened those who found fault with him to petulant children playing in the market-place, who would be pleased with nothing. 6. *Always by remembering that we are in the fellowship of Christ herein, and seeking his Spirit's aid to rightly bear this trial.*—C.

Vers. 14, 15.—*Characteristics of injustice.* They may be traced in the incident recorded in these verses. Unjust judges as were these—

I. WILL NOT HEARKEN TO THE ACCUSED.

II. ARE BIASSED BY PASSION.

III. ARE NEEDLESSLY CRUEL.

IV. SEEK NOT RIGHT, BUT REVENGE.

LEARN. To be careful what manner of spirit we are of whenever we are called upon to judge one another. Let us be thankful that the Judge before whom we stand, and who surveys all our ways, is that gracious Lord to whom the Father has committed all judgment, and who judges not righteously only, but in all mercy as well.—C.

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Ver. 20.—"*Out of weakness made strong.*" This verse an utterance, not of a sturdy invincible soul, but one of a gentle, shrinking, and often timid nature. Note—

I. THE PROPHET JEREMIAH belonged to the company of those who, out of weakness, God has made strong. 1. By nature and temperament *he was the reverse of strong.* Proof in this verse. Suffering was ever terrible to him. Hence he piteously pleads for the king's help. And *passim* we have indications of the gentleness of his nature (cf. ch. i. 6, "Ah, Lord, I cannot;" and homily on ch. iv. 19—30, "*The fellowship of Christ's sufferings,*" vol. i. p. 100). But: 2. Notwithstanding this, *see how strong he became.* When it came to the test, how he endured (cf. ch. i. 10, 17, 18)! Nothing would induce him to alter his word towards the king, the prophets, and the people generally. He softened not one line of his message, although it would have been so much to his advantage to have done so. Now—

II. THIS IS THE GLORY OF GOD'S GRACE ALWAYS. There will be glory *by-and-by,* an outward glory on every child of God. "Eye hath not seen," etc. *But the present glory* of God's grace is this, that out of weakness it makes its recipients strong. See what it did for the apostles, and especially for St. Peter—they the recreants and the denier of the Lord, but afterwards his valiant and undaunted witnesses. And grace has done the same for not a few in prospect of suffering and trial from which beforehand they would have utterly shrunk away. Women and children were amongst the number of the martyrs; and in the moral martyrdoms of this softer age they are so still. God strengthens his servants "with might by his Spirit in the inner man." *And this is the glory of his grace.* Not the numbers of the Church, nor her wealth, rank, gifts, or aught of such sort, but the spiritual strength that characterizes her. "I can do all things," said St. Paul, "through Christ which strengtheneth me." *And it will be so yonder in the better world hereafter.* The glory of that day will not be the golden streets, the gates of pearl, the foundations of precious stones; not the vast throng of the redeemed, nor aught that belongs only to their circumstances, happy as they will be; but it will be *the character* of them all. And this will be *their security also.* The defences of that condition of the redeemed will not be outward, but inward. They, having been strengthened with might by the Spirit of God in the inner man, will have come to be rooted—like the giant oak, which no tempest can uproot from the ground—and grounded—like the deep-laid foundation of the temple, which naught can overthrow—in love, and so "Christ will dwell in" their "hearts." Yes, their glory will be their defence also.

CONCLUSION. Seek, therefore, this grace of Divine strength. Bow your "knees to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," that, "according to the riches of his glory," he would grant you this. Then, though weak and wavering by nature, steadiness and strength shall be given to your will, your heart, and so God will make you as he did his prophet—as "a defenced city, an iron pillar, a brazen wall" (ch. i. 18).—C.

Ver. 21.—*The rough wind stayed in the day of the east wind.* Very terrible to the prophet were the sufferings he had to bear. Hence he seeks for relief by petitioning the king for help, which the king is led to bestow (ver. 21). It is an illustration of how God stays his rough wind, etc. Note—

I. GOD OFTEN LETS SORE TROUBLE COME TO HIS SERVANTS.

II. BUT HE APPOINTS IT ACCORDING TO THEIR POWER OF ENDURANCE. He is not a hard master, gathering where he has not strawed, nor reaping where he has not sown. He fits the back for the burden it has to bear. If staying in the dread dungeon was too great a trial for his prophet, he will have him taken out. The wave that would have sunk the boat in which our Lord was with his disciples was never permitted to beat into it. A great many others came, but not that one. And so it ever is. "As thy day, so thy strength." God will be our "arm every morning."

III. THEREFORE "TAKE NO THOUGHT FOR THE MORROW," etc.—C.

Ver. 3.—*A request for intercession.* A request of this kind has always to be looked at through the character of the man who prefers it. It makes all the difference whether it be the utterance of grovelling superstition or of enlightened piety. It is a long way from this request of Zedekiah to the request of Paul: "Brethren, pray for us." Let us try to estimate—

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I. THE NOTION ZEDEKIAH HAD OF GOD. A notion evidently altogether detached from any considerations of character; we are told in ver. 2 that Zedediah did not hearken to the words of the Lord through his prophet Jeremiah, and we could infer as much from the request here addressed to the prophet. Zedekiah looked upon Jehovah pretty much as he did upon the deities of surrounding nations. The notion was that the immense power of these deities could be turned in any direction desired, if only they were sufficiently propitiated. Now, if Zedekiah had cared to attend to the volume of prophecy, he would have seen very clearly that he who comes to God must believe that he is a God who will not pass over the misgovernment, the cruelty, the injustice, of human kings. And so when we come to God our prayers will have reality just in proportion as they show a distinct understanding of the character of God.

II. THE NOTION ZEDEKIAH HAD OF PRAYER. Had he indeed any notion at all? Did he mean anything more than that Jeremiah should go and do whatever he thought necessary and effectual? Intercessory prayer can be of little use to those who do not pray for themselves. Zedekiah wanted a certain end, namely, that by help of Egypt he should repel the Chaldeans. And he looked upon Jehovah as being a sort of heavenly Pharaoh. And just as he had sent, doubtless, one ambassador to ask for Pharaoh's help, so now he wants to make Jeremiah an ambassador to Jehovah. This was all very foolish, ignorant, and presumptuous on Zedekiah's part; but what better are we when we make up our prayers of petitions for things that we desire without stopping to consider that no petition is worth anything unless it not merely accords with the will of God, but even springs from that will? The use of prayer is that God may serve us according to his estimate of our needs, not according to our estimate.

III. THE NOTION ZEDEKIAH HAD OF THE PROPHET. He had a superstitious feeling that Jeremiah could do something for him he could not do for himself. We see here the secret of the power of priestcraft. We see how it was that false prophets got such a hold. We see how it is that priestcraft and spiritual dictation still prevail. The great bulk of men will not do the right thing towards God, they will not repent and crucify self, but a deep necessity impels them to do something, and so they seek to other men. Zedekiah was making an altogether wrong use of the prophet. His duty was to obey the prophet's messages, then he would not have needed to ask Jeremiah to pray for him. And let all people understand with respect to ministers of religion, that they exist to teach and help in a brotherly way; but that also they are frail and fallible, and possess no mystic virtue to make their prayers more efficacious than the prayers of other people. Intercessory prayer is the duty, the privilege, the power, of every Christian.—Y.

Vers. 9, 10.—*Israel's delusion as to its enemy.* I. THE DELUSION ENTERTAINED. That a great army is before Jerusalem is, of course, no delusion, and that it may effect a great deal of damage of a certain sort is no delusion. The delusion lies here, in supposing that the removal of the army would be the removal of the danger. And this delusion being strong in the minds of the people led them to seek the help of Egypt. A carnal foe was to be overcome by the help of a carnal friend. And similarly we are all led into most mistaken policies of life by seeing only our visible enemies. In our solicitude to guard against the seen enemy, and keep in safety our own visible possessions, we make too much of visible things altogether. It is very hard, of course, to admit this; it is very hard for the natural mind to see its delusions; but then it is the very mark of delusions that they put on the semblance of fundamental and important truths. Again and again appeal is made to what is called common sense to testify to the validity of delusions. The common belief of the multitude is cited to stop the mouth of any one who ventures to proclaim what he is sure is true. Those who have got to the heights and advanced places of spiritual experience know full well that the maxims and rules of the natural man are little but a mass of pernicious delusions. Thus men carefully preserve the shell of life, while the interior treasure for which the shell exists is utterly neglected.

II. THE DELUSION EXPOSED. God makes plain who the real enemy of Jerusalem is, an enemy whom a thousand Pharaohs and a thousand Egypts would vainly contend against. In one sense Jehovah himself is enemy, but what he says amounts to this, that Jerusalem itself is its own worst enemy. While it is rebellious against him, and

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full of all unrighteousness, he must work against it by all available instruments. To destroy the Chaldean army is only as it were to break the warrior's sword; he can seize another and continue the conflict. It is of the greatest possible consequence that we should know in any conflict whether we are fighting simply against man, or whether behind the man who is in front of us there be the purpose and the strength of God. How much of human energy has been wasted, how many have had failure stamped on all their efforts, simply because it has not been known that God has been behind human conflicts! God would have us make sure—and he gives us ample means for the attainment—that we are not fighting against him.

III. THE DELUSION MAINTAINED. This is made plain to us as we read on in the narrative. An example is given to us of how people often do not wake to the delusions of life till too late. They walk contentedly in a vain show, and the realities flowing out of the ministry of Christ they reckon to be dreams. We may depend upon it that delusions will be maintained, most ingeniously, most tenaciously, until by the power of God our eyes are opened to distinguish reality from appearance, and truth from falsehood.—Y.

Vers. 17—19.—*The secret question of a king and the bold answer of a prophet.* I. THE SECRET QUESTION OF A KING. 1. *The secrecy.* Why should a king with all his authority do a thing in secrecy? Was it policy or fear that dictated this secret consultation with Jeremiah? Fear, probably, was the largest element. He was afraid of what the princes and courtiers around him would say. Note other secret interviews sought by men of rank and authority. Herod, a king, privily calls the wise men from the East. Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, comes to Jesus by night. What men of position do cannot be concealed easily. The very effort to conceal is often only a more effective publication. The lesson is that, however quietly and unobtrusively we may do a thing, we must do it so as not in the least fearing publicity. The very difficulty of keeping secrets is a divinely ordained difficulty to help in keeping men in the paths of righteousness. 2. *The evident faith of the king in Jeremiah's office.* The faith was superstitious and unpractical, but still, such as it was, it exerted a power over the king's conduct. This increases the king's responsibility, for it shows that he was not able to get Jeremiah and his message out of his mind. 3. *The indication as to what sort of answer was expected.* Not in words, of course, but we can guess what the tone of the inquiry was. Jeremiah came from a prison to prophesy, and doubtless the king thought that the privations of the past and the hopes of liberty might draw some flattering word from the prophet. Altogether, what a pitiable position this king was in—waiting eagerly, half in terror, half in threatening, upon the word of one of his humble subjects, and the same a prisoner!

II. THE BOLD ANSWER OF A PROPHET. What great things are required from a prophet! He must always be in close and living relation to truth. He must always be ready to meet the manifold temptations which beset a man who is specially sent forth to speak the truth. His first question must ever be, not—What is the safe path, or the easy path? but—What is God's path? Here he was in close and private dealing with a king. Perhaps, as he looked upon Zedekiah thus sending for him secretly, he compassionated him rather than feared him. It was such a revelation of the hollowness of human grandeur. Jeremiah here before Zedekiah is even somewhat of a type of Jesus before Pilate. Jesus will go on testifying to the truth. He will not make Pilate's task one whit easier by accommodating himself to Pilate's desires. Truth, eternal realities, fundamental duties, fidelity to the clear voice of God within the heart,—these must prevail in every one who would follow in the path of Jesus or of prophets and apostles. There is neither real prudence nor real charity without these things.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CONTINUATION.

The object of the princes being frustrated (for in the "court of the guard" Jeremiah had perfect freedom and opportunity of speech), the princes resolve upon a more effectual means of stopping the prophet's mouth. He is thrown into a miry pit, with the object that he may die of starvation.

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Ver. 1.—Two Pashurs appear to be mentioned here: one probably the same who put Jeremiah in the stocks (ch. xx. 1, 2); the other a member of the first of Zedekiah's two embassies to the prophet (ch. xxi. 1). On **Jucal**, see ch. xxxvii. 3. **Had spoken**; rather, *kept speaking*.

Vers. 2, 3.—**He that remaineth**, etc. Jeremiah repeats what he had said to Zedekiah's embassy in ch. xxi. 9, 10.

Ver. 4.—**For thus**; literally, *for therefore*; i.e. because he is left in impunity (comp. the use of the phrase in ch. xxix. 28). **He weakeneth the hands of the men of war**; *i.e.* he dispirits them. It is important to get this "outside view" of the preaching of Jeremiah. There is evidently some excuse for the opponents of Jeremiah. It was a matter of life and death to resist the Chaldeans, and Jeremiah was, according to the politicians, playing into the hands of the enemy (see further in general Introduction). The addition of the words, **that remain**, shows that the bitter end of the resistance was fast approaching.

Ver. 5.—**He is in your hand**. The growing power of the "princes" (see on ch. xxii. 4) seems to have confined the king to a merely secondary *rôle*.

Ver. 6.—**The dungeon**; more literally, *the cistern*. "Every house in Jerusalem was supplied with a subterranean cistern, so well constructed that we never read of the city suffering in a siege from want of water" (Dr. Payne Smith). A grotto bearing the name of Jeremiah has been shown at Jerusalem since the fifteenth century. Under its floor are vast cisterns, the deepest of which professes to be the prison into which the prophet was thrown. The objection is that the sacred narrative proves that the prison was in the city, whereas "the present grotto was not included within the walls until the time of Herod Agrippa" (Thomson, 'The Land and the Book,' 1881, p. 555). **The son of Hammelech**; rather, *a royal prince* (as ch. xxxvi. 26).

Ver. 7.—**Ebed-melech the Ethiopian**. The name means "the king's slave." Ebers remarks that the eunuchs employed in the modern East are nearly all negroes, on whom the shameful operation has been performed by Copts in Upper Egypt. Zedekiah's harem is referred to in vers. 22, 23.

Ver. 9.—**For there is no more bread in the city**. It would almost seem as if the little remaining bread had been brought together by command of the magistrates, and that it was given out in rations by them (comp. ch. xxxvii. 21).

Ver. 10.—**Thirty men**. Why so many were sent is not clear. Are we to suppose that the princes would resist Jeremiah's release? But "the king is not he," etc. (ver. 5). Is it not a scribe's error for "three" (so Ewald, Hitzig, and Graf)?

Ver. 11.—**Under the treasury**; rather, *to (a room) under the treasury*. **Old cast clouts**, etc.; literally, *rags of torn garments and rags of worn-out garments*.

Ver. 14.—**The third entry**. What this means exactly is not clear; probably the "entry" led from the palace to the temple. It must have been a private place, else it would not have been chosen for this interview. **I will ask thee a thing**; rather, *I will ask of thee a word*; i.e. a revelation from Jehovah (comp. ch. xxxvii. 17).

Ver. 15.—**Wilt thou not hearken**; rather, *thou wilt not hearken*.

Ver. 16.—**That made us this soul**. A very unusual formula (comp. Isa. lvii. 16).

Ver. 17.—**The king of Babylon's princes**. Nebuchadnezzar himself was in Riblah (ch. xxxix. 5).

Ver. 22.—**All the women that are left**; *i.e.* probably the wives of Zedekiah's royal predecessors, who had passed into his own harem as concubines. Even Hezekiah, as Payne Smith well points out, had a numerous harem ('Records of the Past,' i. 39, where "daughters" is equivalent to "girls"). Zedekiah's own wives are spoken of in the next verse. **Thy friends have set thee on**, etc. The first half of this taunting song (*mâshâl*) reminds of Obad. 7 (for other points of contact with Obadiah, see on ch. xlix. 7—22). The meaning is that, after urging the weak-minded Zedekiah on to a conflict with the Chaldeans, they have left him involved in hopeless difficulties.

Ver. 23.—**So they**, etc.; rather, *and they*, etc. The women spoken of are different from those in ver. 22. **Thou shalt cause this city to be burned**. The literal rendering (see margin) is, *Thou shalt burn this city*; but the Septuagint, Peshito, and Targum have "As for this city it shall be burned," which suits the parallelism better.

Ver. 27.—**He told them according to all these words**. A controversy has arisen as to whether Jeremiah was justified in concealing the truth. But is a man bound to confess the truth to a murderer?

Ver. 28.—**And he was there when**, etc. The words, of which this is an incorrect version, ought to begin the first verse of the next chapter. Render (with Coverdale), *And it came to pass when Jerusalem was taken (in the ninth year of Zedekiah came Nebuchadrezzar*, etc.; *in the eleventh year . . . the city was cleft open) that all the princes*, etc. The correctness of the reading is, however, open to some doubt (see introduction to next chapter).

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HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—13.—*Jeremiah in the pit.* I. JEREMIAH PREACHES FAITHFULLY. (Vers. 2, 5.) His conduct is wise, brave, and noble. On the surface it savours of pusillanimity. But so much the greater the wisdom and courage that inspire it. Personally Jeremiah is in greater danger from his fellow-citizens than from the invaders. To rouse the anger of the people amongst whom he is living by apparently favouring the plans of their enemies requires no little firmness of character. Moreover, strong moral courage is requisite for such a course as that of Jeremiah's. His patriotism is certain to be taken for treachery, his wisdom for cowardice. He stands alone with his unpopular advice, sure that it will not be followed, sure that his motives will be misunderstood and his character maligned. To a sensitive man the situation would be exquisitely painful. Fidelity under it reveals a noble courage. Thus we see how the bravest man may be he who appears to be most weak, while the rash and boastful daring that rushes heedlessly with the multitude but shrinks from a course of unpopularity, is really feeble and cowardly.

II. THE PRINCES ARE ALARMED. (Ver. 4.) They have some reason to dread the effect of Jeremiah's preaching upon the defence of Jerusalem. If they are certain of the wisdom of the course they are pursuing, it is difficult to see how they can regard the prophet with anything less than dismay. Every time his Cassandra notes are heard in the streets it seems as though disaffection were being urged upon the people. The mistake of the princes is in being so wedded to their policy as never to consider the advice of Jeremiah as of any weight and wisdom. Thus we judge and condemn men with absolute certainty to our own mind, but often only because we assume, without reason, the infallibility of our own position.

III. THE KING WEAKLY YIELDS. (Ver. 5.) Zedekiah is helpless in the hands of his courtiers. Like Pilate, he thinks to throw off all responsibility on the accusers whom he dare not oppose (John xviii. 31). But he cannot do this. His weakness is culpable. He is not like a constitutional monarch, legally fettered by a responsible ministry. He is by position a responsible ruler. If he cannot discharge the functions of his position, he should abdicate. In no case is he justified in lending the weight of his name to a deed of which he does not approve. We cannot free ourselves from responsibility by declining to act when it is our duty to interfere and prevent a wrong from being done.

IV. JEREMIAH IS CAST INTO THE PIT. (Ver. 6.) 1. The action of the courtiers is *cruel.* They treat the prophet with needless indignity and evidently design for him the slow torture of a death by starvation. 2. It is also *cowardly.* They dare not execute him openly. The horrible fate is assigned to him because it is less dangerous to themselves. 3. The prophet is now in the *lowest condition* of wretchedness, down in the pit, sunk in the mire, left in that cold, dark solitude to the horrors of approaching starvation. Those of us who are ready to murmur at slighter trouble should remember how much better men than we have had to endure far greater suffering and humiliation than ours. What shame and agony were heaped upon Christ the Son of God!

V. THE ETHIOPIAN INTERCEDES. (Vers. 7—9.) 1. This man was a *heathen* by nation, but a good man. Character, not profession, is the one thing of significance with all of us. 2. He was a man of an apparently *inferior race.* It is better to have a black skin and a humane heart than a white skin and a black heart. 3. He was regarded as an *effeminate creature.* True manliness belongs to our conduct, not to our appearance and manners. God raises up friends in the most unlikely quarters. One of the advantages of trouble is that it reveals unknown friends.

VI. JEREMIAH IS DELIVERED. The weak king only wants the encouragement of his chamberlain to do an act of justice which his own conscience must have urged him to all along. When the distress and danger of Jeremiah are vividly brought before him, he rouses himself. Many people are too weak to do their duty till their imagination and feelings are wrought upon. They live in comfortable indifference to the wretchedness of others simply because they have not been made to feel it. They are not to be excused on this account. But knowing the fact, we should do more to make the needs of the poor, the sick, and the heathen felt by the indifferent who ought to help them. A higher providence leads to the deliverance of Jeremiah. God watches over him in

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the dungeon, and God sees that he is saved from it. So God will save his people from all their troubles, though in some cases the minister of deliverance is that dark angel of death whose advent the miserable in Andrea Orcagna's picture at Pisa welcome with joy.

Ver. 6.—*The apparent misanthropy of revelation.* The political aspect of these words is evident; let us now consider their moral bearings. The inspired prophet of God is taken for an enemy of his neighbours. The experience of Jeremiah is not without parallel, nor is it wanting in certain reasonable grounds of justification.

I. THERE ARE THINGS IN REVELATION WHICH APPEAR TO INDICATE MISANTHROPY. When God utters his voice he does not always speak in dulcet notes. We may hear harsh, grating thunders of Sinai. The message is not always pleasant. It makes us feel uncomfortable, exposes our worst characteristics, and has no pity on our little contrivances for putting the best face on our conduct. It stays our hand in many a favourite occupation. It cries "vanity of vanities" to our pet schemes. It puts a veto on our proud ambition. It frowns at much of our pleasure. For the future it threatens judgment and bitter penalties. When we fancy we have found some neat plan of escape, it exposes the rottenness of our hope and plunges us for the moment into blank despair. Such is the work of certain parts of revelation, and being so, it is not unnaturally regarded by some as misanthropic. Bearing this fact in mind, we must not be surprised at the aversion that the irreligious feel to religion. Judging from this standpoint, they may regard their best friend as their enemy, and imagine that the angry voice of God indicates nothing but his settled wrath against them.

II. THIS MISANTHROPY IS ONLY APPARENT. Jeremiah was the best friend of Jerusalem, and the fanatical leaders of resistance her most fatal foes. His advice was really wise and patriotic. The Bible, which to some is a gloomy Book, darkening the aspect of human life, contains the secret of its true blessedness. The religion of the Bible may be sombre in the eyes of some when compared with the sunny religion of Greece. But the Hellenic faith could not save its followers from utter moral corruption and ruin. Through the sterner faith of the Jew and the Christian we are led to that one satisfying brightness of life which comes from the rising upon us of the Sun of righteousness. We must judge of words by their aim, not by their sound. The Bible contains threats of terrible doom, but as we discover the purpose of them we see that they are not curses but warnings. God often opposes us, stays our course, puts up the red signal, only to save us from rushing to some fatal calamity. Elijah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Savonarola, and John Knox were regarded by their contemporaries as misanthropic. Now we see that they were the salt of the earth, true saviours of society. Even Christ uttered words which might seem to indicate misanthropy, but all with the intention of leading men to escape from the evils he deplored and find salvation in his grace.

Ver. 11.—"*Old cast clouts and old rotten rags.*" I. THERE IS A USE FOR EVERYTHING. These rags were possibly thrown aside as useless. Yet they were found to serve a distinct purpose. Amongst the wonderful combinations of invention and economy in the present day, none are more remarkable than those which turn waste materials to serviceable ends. There is a mission for every life. No man is so low, so worn, so worthless, but that he may find some way in which to serve God and his fellows. If a rag has a mission, shall a soul find none?

II. IF WE CANNOT ATTAIN THE HIGHEST OBJECT AIMED AT, WE SHOULD NOT NEGLECT THAT WHICH IS WITHIN OUR REACH. The rags may once have been prince's robes. Now they are only fit for the lowest uses. Then let them be so used. There is an impractical idealism which paralyzes all effort. Because a thing cannot be turned to the highest account we will not use it at all. So there are those who refuse to do anything because they can do nothing very great, or who, being compelled to give up a work of honour, are too proud to undertake a more lowly task. We should remember Goethe's maxim, "Do the thing that lieth nearest thee." Thus a useful rag may be a rebuke to a useless man.

III. THE GREATEST MAN MAY HAVE NEED OF THE MOST COMMONPLACE APPLIANCES. A prophet finds comfort from a rag. We are none of us emancipated from relation to the lowest things. This should humble those who make the dignity of their nature a

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reason for despising the offices of lowly things and persons. It should encourage those who have but small means. They may be of material comfort to some far above them. Great and small, we are linked together for our mutual helpfulness.

IV. DEEDS OF KINDNESS SHOULD BE PERFORMED IN A KIND MANNER. Carelessness and roughness of demeanour may spoil half the effect of the most well-meant offices of charity. There are philanthropists who would lift the prisoner from the pit, but with hard, coarse ropes, without any consideration for his sore and weary body. The purpose is gracious, but the manner is brutal. Christians should not be mere patrons, wounding the feelings of those whom they help in other respects, but the brethren of the distressed, aiding them carefully, gently, courteously. This is the manner of God's great deliverance of mankind; it is by a Saviour who "shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench" (Isa. xlii. 2, 3).

Vers. 19—23.—*The fear of ridicule.* I. THE FEAR OF RIDICULE IS A COMMON FAILING OF WEAK MEN. Zedekiah is a weak man. His first thought when he contemplates the possible effects of obedience to the Divine command is that it may result in his being delivered into the hands of the captives at Babylon to be mocked by them (ver. 17). This he dreads above all things. Many men who would stand up without flinching to be shot at cower before a laugh. Let them understand that their conduct is weak and foolish and wrong.

II. THE FEAR OF RIDICULE IS A FREQUENT CAUSE OF NEGLECT OF DUTY. This is one of the chief weapons of persecution and temptation exercised in our own day. The rack and the stake are out of fashion; the sneer and the gibe have taken their place. Milton's Satan has been superseded by Goethe's Mephistopheles. The young are specially sensitive to ridicule. They especially should seek grace from God to stand firm against it.

III. THE FEAR OF RIDICULE PROVOKES RIDICULE. Jeremiah showed the king that disobedience coming out of his dread of being mocked would result in worse mockery. Fearing the laughter of captive soldiers, he would be mocked by women; dreading the contempt of strangers, he should meet with that of his own house (ver. 22). Face a laugh, and you foil its spiteful intention; quail before it, and you give it the victory and furnish occasion for fresh contempt. The young man who sneaks away from his religious principles because his companions in business laugh at him for them is only despised for his contemptible weakness, while that young man who quietly holds his ground unmoved by senseless ridicule wins the secret respect of observers, and makes them inwardly ashamed of their folly.

IV. THE FEAR OF RIDICULE MAY END IN FATAL RESULTS. Jeremiah pointed this out to the king (ver. 23). The horrible charge of having brought about the burning of the city would be attached to his name, and the guilt of it to his soul. Here was a far greater cause of alarm than the danger of a laugh. Weak men who are moved by such contemptible motives as those that influenced Zedekiah should be roused by a rude shock, if that is necessary, for them to see the dread and solemn issues of life and the fearful evils they may evoke while trifling with duty in childish timidity.

V. IT IS OUR DUTY TO CONQUER THE FEAR OF RIDICULE BY FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE TO THE WILL OF GOD. Here lies the remedy (ver. 20). To some this fear is keen and almost irresistible. But it is wholly selfish. It is associated with morbid, self-regarding thoughts. If we realize the idea that God is speaking to us and watching us, all ideas of the thoughts of men about us should sink to the dust. With earnest convictions of duty and true efforts of obedience inspired by the grace of Christ, which is sufficient for us, we may brave this thorn in the flesh—the fear of man that bringeth a snare.

Ver. 20.—*The blessedness of obedience.* Jeremiah entreats Zedekiah to obey the voice of God urging him with promises of deliverance. Note here—

I. THE ENTREATY. Jeremiah says, "I beseech thee." This is characteristic of the kindliness and earnestness of the prophet. It is also indicative of the character of God who inspired him. With St. Paul he might have said, "We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating you by us; we beseech you on

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behalf of Christ, . . . be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. v. 20). This Divine entreaty signifies (1) *earnestness*—God truly desires our good; (2) *kindliness and sympathy*; (3) *condescension*; and (4) the *greatness of the issues at stake.*

II. THE DUTY. 1. This is *obedience*, the cardinal duty of the Old Testament. The importance of this duty in the New Testament has been underrated. There, too, it takes a first place in the teaching of Christ (John xv. 14) and of his apostles—St. Paul (Rom. ii. 8), St. Peter (1 Pet. iii. 1), St. John (1 John iii. 24), and St. James (Jas. i. 22). Indeed, all religion consists in submission (passive faith) and obedience (active faith). 2. Such obedience must be *implicit*. Zedekiah did not understand the reason of the Divine command. To carry it out was unpalatable to him and his people. But once we know God's will, questions of mystery and of inclination should not affect us. In the gospel dispensation obedience is more intelligent. We have spiritual principles in place of formal precepts. Yet here also there is often mystery and fear as to the results of obedience, and then our duty is the soldier's duty of unquestioning obedience.

"Theirs not to reason why;
Theirs but to do and die."

III. THE CLAIM. 1. It rests on the *will of God*. The king is to obey the voice of God. The monkish duty of obedience stayed with the ecclesiastical superior. But the spiritual Christian must feel that he owes his supreme allegiance directly to God. Our King and Father commands. We must obey *his* will. 2. It is determined by the *revelation of the will of God*. The obedience is to be given to the voice as it is made known by the prophet. "Which I speak unto thee." We are only responsible for obedience to God's will as far as he has revealed it to us. But we cannot plead total ignorance of his will. That has been declared by prophets and apostles, manifested in Christ, confirmed by the Spirit of God in our conscience.

IV. THE PROMISE. 1. *Whatever happens.* "It shall be well"—a vague promise, but sufficient. We cannot tell what is well for us. The thing God sends may not seem good as it approaches. But in the result it shall be well. That is enough for faith. 2. *Life is secured.* "And thy soul shall live." What is the use of the preservation of our possessions if our life is taken? Men toil for earthly gain and forget that the one condition of enjoying it may go at any moment. Life in the highest sense, eternal life, is the full reward for obedience.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 4—13.—*Foreshadowings and analogies of the cross.* The pitiable fate of Jeremiah, so uncalled for and unexpected both in its inflictions and deliverances, the light and shade so strongly contrasted, become charged as we proceed with a certain suggestiveness of something unspeakably greater yet to come. In other words, Jeremiah is perceived to be not only a prophet, but a type of Christ. The charge of treason, the defiance of legal safeguards and requirements by the princes, the wavering and helplessness of the king, the living death in the miry dungeon, and the resurrection through the kind aid of Ebed-Melech, are types of the most unmistakable kind of the characteristic redemptive experiences of the Man of sorrows. And this is only one out of many proofs that *human history, especially sacred history, betrays a system of correspondence in its events with those which constituted the earthly experience of the Messiah.*

I. THEY CALL ATTENTION TO THE MANIFESTATION OF CHRIST AND HELP TO FIX AND IDENTIFY IT. All along the line of Old Testament revelation there were these finger-posts or indicators of the coming struggle between righteousness and sin. The cross is closely associated with the very first pages of revelation, and gives meaning and connection to the loftiest, deepest, and most anomalous utterances and occurrences of the Old Testament. With its many anticipations, echoes, and secondaries, the cross of Christ asserts itself as the central and most commanding principle of human history.

II. THEY REVEAL THE SAME LAW OPERATING THROUGHOUT THE WORLD'S HISTORY AND HUMAN EXPERIENCE. Prehistoric myths and heathen religions, although incapable of attaining to such a Divine conception, yet presuppose and grope after it. And in many

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an illustrious and obscure human consciousness had the cross made its impress ere the Redeemer of mankind was called upon to suffer. 1. *They proved the necessity of Christ's sufferings.* As the true character of the issue between good and evil declared itself more and more plainly, it became evident that some more decisive determination of it must take place. Each previous or subsequent experience of the conflict is indecisive and incomplete apart from the Messianic sufferings. Christ must needs suffer, if only to bring to a head and final settlement the long-pending question as to whether good or evil is the true law of human life and of the world. It was no accidental, abnormal series of occurrences that constituted our Saviour's experience, but the culmination of ages of mutual development in the forces of righteousness and sin, and the true exponent of their respective characters and tendencies. 2. *They helped to deepen and educate the spiritual sense of men, and to prepare them for a true appreciation of the mystery of the cross.* It is the cross in us that leads us to the cross without. The deep tribulation of the saints of the early Church led them to more profound conceptions of moral action and spiritual requirement. Jeremiah was here a type of Judah, the feet of whose king were "in the mire" (ver. 22). Each occasion like this of Jeremiah's condemnation and imprisonment was a loud warning of the possibilities of evil that were still in the womb of time, and showed the direction of the tendency of the world-spirit. It showed, too, how closely related was the life of men with the unseen and the eternal. A moral order behind the chain of events was continually declaring itself. Its very peculiarities and anomalies demonstrated the existence of a higher law. The awful depths and heights yet to be attained by the moral nature of man were suggested, and the certainty gradually induced that the kingdom of light would yet meet and overcome the force of the kingdom of darkness. The faith, obedience, and meekness of man would yet be vindicated by the invincible power and authority of God.—M.

Vers. 7—13.—*Ebed-Melech; or, unlooked-for sympathy and help.* I. ITS CIRCUMSTANCES. These were such as to impress the mind of the prophet. He was deliberately consigned by the princes of the people to the dungeon, and the king consented, so that there would appear to be no appeal. His heart must have failed him as he felt himself sinking in the mire. In a prison like that he was in imminent danger of being forgotten and starved. Apparently it was intended as an effectual means of "putting out of the way." And all this was due to what? Doing his duty. The very persons whom he sought to benefit either turned against or ignored him. The whole situation was desperate. It appeared as if no human help could save. It is just at such times that faith receives its confirming, ultimate lessons.

II. ITS CHARACTER. 1. *In itself.* It was: (1) *Thoughtful.* It has been suggested that, as the dungeon was in the palace, "he came to the knowledge of it by hearing Jeremiah's moans." This may or may not have been; but when he knew of the situation of the prophet he was concerned and full of sympathy. It is this spirit which true religion, and especially the gospel of Christ, ever fosters, and the world has need of it. (2) *Prompt.* In a question like that of a few hours at the utmost, no delay had to be made if the prisoner was to be saved. As the king was "then sitting in the gate of Benjamin," he went out immediately and sought an audience. And he urged expedition. One of the finest recommendations of help is that it is given when it is needed. The case is taken up as if it were his own. How many philanthropies miss fire because they are kept too long without being carried into effect? *Bis dat qui cito dat.* (3) *Courageous.* He went straight to the king, by whose order he must have known the thing had been done, and spoke with quick, nervous fearlessness and condemnation. There was not only feeling here, but principle. He was evidently careless as to the consequences to himself. (4) *Practical.* Ebed-Melech meant that the thing should be done, and so he took the requisite steps to carry it out. Everything is thought of and applied to the purpose. Even in the "old cast clouts" there is evidence of forethought and careful, if novel, application of means to ends. 2. *In its origin.* Ebed-Melech was: (1) An alien. A negro, and not a Jew, and one from his office disqualified from participating in the benefits of the covenant. It is the more remarkable that none of Jeremiah's countrymen interposed. (2) A servant of a vicious king. The establishments of such princes are usually stamped with the same character, and their

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members are but the creatures of their masters. There is something doubly unlooked-for, therefore, in such an advocate and friend. It is like a salutation from one of "Cæsar's household." (3) It is also probable that he was one called out by the occasion. No mention of him is made either before or after.

III. WHAT IT TEACHES. 1. *True religion does not depend upon conventional forms.* Not that these are therefore without value, but they are not of the essence of religion. It is Divine faith, with its outflowing charities and works, that alone can save man and glorify God. Rahab the harlot and Naaman the Syrian are but instances of many formally outside of the kingdom of God, but really within it. Let each ask, "Am I, who have received so much privilege, really a child of grace?" 2. *The kingdom of God is always stronger than it seems.* As to Elijah the assurance, "Yet I have left *me* seven thousand in Israel," so to Jeremiah is this experience. We are never justified in despairing of human nature if God be in his world. 3. *Implicit trust in God as the only Saviour.* The raising up of such a deliverer was so unique and unexpected as to call attention to it as a work of God. It was supernatural and special, and spoke of gracious intervention. He would not abandon his servant, nor will he any who put their trust in him.—M.

Vers. 11, 12.—"*Old cast clouts.*" This incident is very vividly described; and "the touch of human kindliness in the good negro's direction to Jeremiah to put under his armpits the soft rags thrown down to him, to prevent the chafing of the cords which drew him up, is inimitably natural." The sharp cords would otherwise have cut him so severely as to render his elevation exceedingly painful, if not practically impossible. To how many conflicting thoughts and feelings do these rags, brought from the king's house under the treasury, not give rise? What vicissitudes must they have passed through! Now, after they have been cast aside as useless, a new, unthought-of use is suddenly discovered for them. Rags it may be of royal garments used in stately pageants; was not even this a kingly service to which they were put?

I. OF HOW EXQUISITE A SYMPATHY WERE THEY THE EXPRESSION! The whole situation of the prophet had been thoroughly entered into and grasped by his friend. He is not satisfied with merely drawing him up; he will do this in the gentlest and most considerate way. It is thinking of these little things that shows the depth of our sympathy for others. They are specially remembered and sought out, and are brought forward with as much care as the thirty men. 1. *Our good deeds should not be half conceived or badly executed.* "What is worth doing is worth doing well." 2. *Where there is a real desire to be kind and helpful, the means will be discovered.* We scarcely know whether to admire the most the kindliness or the ingenuity of Ebed-Melech. 3. *A true sentiment will dispose of false scruples.* Rags! Well, they were best fitted of anything at hand to effect the purpose in view. There was no time to settle the question of the niceties. Much loving and useful work is never done because of such scruples. The servants of God cannot often work in kid gloves. 4. *The dignity of a thing consists in the use to which it is put.* These rags served the best of purposes, and are worthy of all honour. There is nothing God has made but has some gracious use if we but seek for it.

II. THROUGH WHAT HUMILIATIONS ARE GOD'S SERVANTS DELIVERED! As if the mire and helplessness were not enough! To an unspiritual perception it would appear almost an uncalled-for indignity to inflict the rags upon the prophet of God. But they were necessary. And so is it with all the God-sent humiliations of life. They are intended to subdue pride, exercise faith, and reveal the hidden grace and power of God.

III. THERE ARE DIVINE USES FOR MEAN THINGS AND THINGS CAST ASIDE. God, who made all things, can see a thousand adaptations and utilities for that which man supposes has been used up. Are there not weapons in the King's armoury that have been allowed to rust when they might have done good service? talents that have been hid in a napkin when they should have been at usury? There need be no idle members in the King's household. He takes out of his treasury things new and old, and calls upon the blind, the halt, the maimed, the aged, the poor, the ignorant, to do him honour and service. "But I have no talents in that direction," etc. Yet God can use you if you will ask him. He will regenerate you by using you; purify you of all the moral dross and filth that adhere to you; and develop higher faculties and a diviner

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serviceableness, if you will but let him. There were kingly robes in Judah that day that had not a tithe of the honour of these "old rotten rags;" and there are great, wise, and noble who will have to give place in the day of judgment to the weak things, and things which have been despised (1 Cor. i. 26—31).—M.

Vers. 17—23.—*God's terms of salvation hard.* I. IN WHAT THEY ARE HARD. 1. *They attack our pride.* Zedekiah was afraid of the mockery of "the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans." He did not like to acknowledge himself in error. There was no glory in surrender. Pride is one of the first hindrances to salvation. We want to be our own saviours. 2. *They crush self-will.* "Not as I will, but as thou wilt"—the first and last prayer of the true child of God. It was not Zedekiah's plan, and contradicted all the policy of his rebellion. It should be sufficient to the sinner to know that God has appointed the way of escape. He has no right to choose. 3. *They require faith.* How was the king to be certain that yielding himself into the hands of the princes of the Chaldeans would secure the ends desired? He hardly realized that it could be so. And similarly it is asked, "How can Jesus save?" He is to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Gentiles foolishness, but to them that believe the Power of God and the Wisdom of God. "*Only believe,*" that is the hardest thing the unregenerate soul can do. Yet it is necessary.

II. THEY DO NOT ADMIT OF COMPROMISE. 1. *See how relentless the alternative.* There is no middle way, no royal road to salvation. It was a step simple enough in itself, but it involved everything, and could not, therefore, be qualified. Christ and his salvation are our only hope: "And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other Name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved" (Acts iv. 12; cf. Gal. i. 8). 2. *Nor is the messenger of God at liberty to alter them.* These are the terms for all, and they represent the infinite wisdom and love of God. It is not for man to attempt to improve upon them. To do so would be equivalent to creating a human gospel. Jeremiah, although he had reasons for ingratiating himself with the wicked king, yet presents an example of faithfulness to every minister of the truth. He might not suffer himself to corrupt the Word of God even for such considerations.

III. YET IS THEIR HARDNESS MORE APPARENT THAN REAL. 1. *Belief and obedience will remove every difficulty.* The troubles of Zedekiah were almost wholly imaginary. Had he not been assured that everything would be made sure by adopting the advice given? One act of faith on the part of the sinner will save him. Henceforth it will be infinitely easier to do the things that remain, and to pass from faith to faith. 2. *How mild are they compared with the consequences of disobedience!*—M.

Ver. 4.—*Counted an enemy for speaking the truth.* "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" said Ahab to Elijah. The Israelites were about to stone the two faithful spies. And here the prophet of God was, as in these other and in many more instances, counted an enemy for speaking the truth. And a like alienation of mind and heart often takes place now for the same reason—the telling of unwelcome truth. Now, note—

I. WHEREFORE DO MEN SO DISLIKE TRUTH? Some of the reasons are: 1. Because *truth must often say many things that are unpleasing.* No matter by what voice the message comes—Scripture, conscience, or our fellow-men,—truth at times will become *censure,* and that hurts our self-love. 2. *We are not really in earnest in our desire to be set right.* We profess to be so, but we are not. "I have been a great sinner," said a sick man to his minister, who was sitting by his bedside. "Yes," said the minister, "you have." "Who told you, I should like to know?" angrily exclaimed the sick man, indignant that anything more special and personal than vague general confession should be thought to be needed by him. He had no desire for cure, but only for comfort. 3. *Pride has much to do with this dislike of truth.* Our reprover becomes for the time being our superior, stands above and over us, and we do not like this. 4. There may be *real difference of opinion* on the point in dispute; hence the censured has the further offence of being condemned on what he deems partial evidence. 5. Because of our *suspicion of the motives* of him who speaks the unwelcome truth. We are slow to credit such with purity and unselfishness of motive. We think not only of what is said, but of who says it

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II. HENCE IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO TELL UNPLEASANT TRUTHS. Most men avoid it, will say nothing, will shirk the duty by every conceivable means. No one likes to act the part of the candid friend. None like to be the bearers of ill tidings. David's servants feared to tell him that his child was dead. How we admire, because of its rarity and difficulty, the fidelity of Nathan's "Thou art the man"!

III. BUT NEVERTHELESS SUCH TRUTH OUGHT TO BE SPOKEN WHEN NECESSARY. It is not always necessary. Often not wise. "The chapter of accidents is the Bible of the fool." To let hard facts speak is sometimes best. But not always. Hence when unwelcome truth has to be spoken, take care: 1. *To be very certain of your ground.* Do not go upon mere rumour. Let your proof be full, clear, and strong. 2. Let the *purity of your motive* in speaking, the unselfishness and the love for your brother which prompt you, be made manifest. 3. *Choose fit times, tones, and words.* Many reserve their telling of such truths for moments when they are in a passion; then they will blurt it out, and, of course, only do more harm than good. 4. *Be strengthened by the remembrance of the duty you owe your brother,* and the accusation he will have against you of blood-guiltiness, if you fail to tell him the truth, unwelcome though it be.

IV. SUCH TRUTH SO SPOKEN, IF REJECTED, IS FOLLOWED BY THE CONDEMNATION OF GOD ON THEM WHO REJECT IT. It is part of that condemnation that men take friends for foes, as Ahab did, and foes for friends. They love flattery and hate truth; the blind lead the blind, and with the inevitable result. Therefore let our feeling be that of the psalmist, who said, "Let the righteous smite me; it shall be kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head."—C.

Ver. 5.—"*Put not your trust in princes.*" What a proof does this incident give of the wisdom of this counsel! Note—

I. ALL ARE TEMPTED TO PUT TRUST IN MEN. To very many man is the highest being they know or believe in. Then, our fellow-men are near at hand; we can understand them and they us; are of like nature—they can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; and they in whom we trust appear to us to possess that which we need but have not.

II. STILL MORE ARE WE PRONE TO PUT OUR TRUST IN PRINCES. We do this because: 1 Of the *law of honour* which is supposed to bind them. The word of a king, where that is there is power. 2. *They have such vast capacity of help.* Unlimited resources seem at their command. 3. They are *independent* of and superior to the influences which govern inferior men. 4. And very often *they have rendered great help* to men in need thereof.

III. But there are many instances which show that THIS TRUST SHOULD BE VERY LIMITED. Here is a case in point. How miserable this king's conduct! Now, wherefore did Zedekiah, and do such as he, disappoint men's expectations (cf. Shakespeare, 'Henry VIII.,' Wolsey's dying speech)? It is because they are governed, not by principle, but by expediency. A tree standing on the summit of a lofty hill needs to be more firmly rooted than trees in the sheltered valley, for it is exposed to every wind that blows. But if it be not so rooted, it will soon fall. So with exalted personages; they are exposed to influences on all sides; all parties seek to gain them over to their views and to enlist them in their favour. Hence if a prince have not firm principles to guide him, he will sway from side to side and finally fall. So it was with this King Zedekiah. He was influenced now by one party and now by another (cf. homily on *The woe of weakness*, ch. xxxiv. 2). "Like a wave of the sea driven of the wind and tossed." And all this is true in measure and degree of all who fill high stations, and in whom men are apt to put great trust. But—

IV. UNLIMITED TRUST SHOULD BE IN GOD ALONE. The prophet of God was doubtless less surprised than grieved, but he had long learned to commit his way unto the Lord. Let us do likewise, and then we may rest assured that, let men above us favour or frown upon us, that which is best for us and for all will assuredly be done.

"Ill that thou blessest turns to good,
And unblest good is ill,
And all is right that seems most wrong,
If it be thy sweet will."

C.

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Vers. 6—13.—"*Cast down, but not forsaken.*" As we look on the prophet as here portrayed, these words of St. Paul are brought to our mind. We have here, as there—

I. A SERVANT OF GOD CAST DOWN. See the prophet's allusions to his sad condition in Lam. iii. 52—57; and Ps. lxix. can hardly be other than descriptive of Jeremiah at this time. And such seasons of depression and distress seem to be the appointed lot of all God's servants. Not one, from our Lord downwards, has been exempted. Manifold are the reasons for such appointment. In this particular case of Jeremiah—

II. THE CAUSES OF HIS DISTRESS were: 1. The cruelty of his treatment acting on a nature such as his. 2. Its coming upon him after he had been led to hope that now he was secure from all such treatment. 3. His knowledge that he desired to be, and was, his foes' best friend, and yet they dealt with him thus. 4. The hopelessness of his condition. Such were the immediate causes of his being cast down.

III. WHEREFORE DOES GOD SUFFER HIS SERVANTS TO BE SUBJECTED TO SUCH DISTRESS? To deepen their hold upon God, as the storms cause the trees to take deeper root in the earth. To make them realize more than ever the help they have in God. To cultivate and foster those fruits of the Spirit, such as patience, humility, trust, etc., which will hardly grow in any other soil or by any other process. To make them mighty witnesses before men of the salvation of God and of the present help he is in trouble. To qualify them to sympathize with and succour others in their distress. How such thoughts are calculated to sustain the soul in distress! And they do, for—

IV. GOD'S SERVANTS ARE, THOUGH CAST DOWN, NOT FORSAKEN. Here was a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel and from the covenants of promise, one who least of all might have been expected to care for the prophet of God, and this stranger proves to be God's good angel of mercy. God raised up this helper in the hour of his servant's need. See what was done in connection with and by this noble-hearted Ethiopian. 1. God caused intelligence of the prophet's sufferings to reach him (ver. 7). 2. He touched his heart with compassion (vers. 7, 9, 11). 3. He led him to resolve to attempt the prophet's deliverance. 4. He gave him clearly to see the wickedness of the prophet's enemies, and the truth of the prophet himself. 5. He filled his heart with courage. For courage was needed. He was alone. The consequences of his interference might have been fatal to himself. He had to reprove and condemn both the king and the king's counsellors. 6. He gave him good success. The king at once yielded, went right over to his side (contrast ver. 5), took all precaution that the deliverance should not be hindered. And he did all this at once. Further, he took oath that Jeremiah should not be so dealt with in the future. Now, all this proves the blessed truth for God's servants that, though they may be cast down, yet they shall not be forsaken.

V. WHAT ARE WE TO LEARN FROM SUCH A RECORD? Much every way. 1. *Concerning God.* He is never at a loss for messengers of mercy and help to his servants. 2. *Concerning his tried and troubled servants.* Patiently wait. Trust at all times. Hope continually, till your eyes see his salvation, as they assuredly shall. 3. *Concerning the enemies of the Lord.* Their designs and purposes must fail, however certain of success they seem to be; for God is against them.—C.

Ver. 16.—*The value of an oath.* The prophet of God evidently attributed such value, or he would not have asked of the king to make oath unto him. On the general subject note—

I. THE TEMPTATIONS TO GO FROM ONE'S WORD ARE OFTEN VERY NUMEROUS AND VERY STRONG. They were so in this case. Jeremiah knew what strong influence there was against him in the court of the king. He had suffered from this already. And he knew how weak and unstable the king was. Hence there was needed that which would steady and strengthen the wavering will. And there is often the like need now.

II. BUT THE VALUE OF AN OATH LIES IN THE FACT THAT IT MEETS THIS NEED. It brings in the thought of *God* and of his displeasure. And does this in most solemn way. And it has around it human sanctions as well as Divine. And all this tends to strengthen conscience and to resist the temptation to untruth. As a fact, it is found that men who are careless about truth in an ordinary way hesitate much before they will disregard an oath. "An oath for confirmation is an end of all strife."

III. IT IS BEST, HOWEVER, NOT TO NEED SUCH AID. Our Saviour has said, "Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh

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of evil." The taking of oaths is allowed, as other practices, "for the hardness of men's hearts." But for the Christian his word ought to be as sacred as his oath. He is no Christian if it be not.—C.

Vers. 17, 18.—*The path of obedience the path of safety.* The circumstances here recorded show that—

I. IT MAY BE MUCH ELSE. It may be (1) a *difficult* path; (2) *humiliating*; (3) *repellant* to our whole disposition and will; (4) seemingly *unlikely*, arguing after the manner of men.

II. BUT IT WILL BE SAFE. 1. *It would have been so in this case.* For the king, his misery, exile, and degradation would have been escaped. The city of Jerusalem would not have been destroyed; nor the temple. All that would have been needful was submission to the rule of Babylon, which would have been neither intolerably harsh nor of long duration. For the prophet knew the rapidly approaching doom of both Babylon and her king. Hence he gave the counsel here told of. Whilst, on the other hand, he knew that if the wrath of the King of Babylon was aroused, all that now might be saved would then be utterly lost. Nebuchadnezzar was now like a sated lion, not desiring to destroy or devour. But let him be angered, and then woe to the weakling that had dared his rage! Submission was, therefore, the prophet's perpetual and earnest counsel. It was a case in which arguments were not merely to be counted, but weighed. 2. *And it is so always.* The path of obedience to God may have much urged against it, and truly urged, but it will ever be found to be the right and best way after all.

III. AND THE REASON IS: the path God commands is the path which pleases him who knows and who controls all events. All other paths are the self-chosen ways of men, who know but little and can control less.

IV. THIS ESPECIALLY TRUE IN REGARD TO THE SINNER'S RECONCILIATION WITH GOD. That path is protested against by voices not a few from within and without. But it is the *right* way, cannot but be so. We, therefore, as ambassadors for God, beseech you "in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."—C.

Ver. 24.—*Trying to serve two masters.* Zedekiah was seeking to do this. He wanted to be on the prophet's side, and yet not to break with the princes who were the prophet's foes. We see the shifts to which he was driven, and we know the miserable outcome of his impossible attempt. We learn from it—

I. HOW DESPICABLE SUCH ATTEMPTS MAKE A MAN IN HIS OWN EYES.

> "To thine own self be true,
> And it shall follow, as the night the day,
> Thou canst not then be false to any man."

But how far from this conscious rectitude he must be who seeks to serve two masters, who acts as Zedekiah did!

II. HOW OTHER MEN DESPISE THEM.

III. How GOD CONDEMNS THEM. How do the instances of Balaam, Pilate, Judas, and others shine out as warning beacons!

IV. HOW USELESS, AFTER ALL, SUCH ATTEMPTS ARE. No more miserable fate could have befallen a man than that which came upon King Zedekiah. And in the highest matter of all, what are they who say, "Lord, Lord," but do not the things the Lord commands—what are they but would-be servers of two masters? And to them the Lord will say, "I never knew you; depart," etc.

V. HOW MUCH FULL DECISION FOR GOD IS NEEDED. This alone will keep us from such sad endeavour; but this will. Therefore seek grace from God to make and abide by this choice; and bring yourselves under the blessed attraction of Christ; so shall you be drawn to him more and more, and made to abide in him.—C.

Ver. 27.—*A question of casuistry.* A deservedly esteemed commentator observes on this conduct of Jeremiah, "Though we must be so harmless as doves as never to tell a wilful lie, yet we must be so wise as serpents as not needlessly to expose ourselves to

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danger by telling all we know." But many are not satisfied with this defence, and they hesitate not to apply the terms "equivocation," "subterfuge," and other like censures to the prophet's reply to the princes. Note, therefore—

I. WHAT IS URGED AGAINST SUCH CONDUCT. One says, "The plain meaning of such words is that Jeremiah hoodwinked them. He did not lie to them, certainly; but he did not tell the truth, and left them with a false impression. It comes very near to deception; it was evasive, and certainly was not an honest act. It seems *an oblique lie.*" And this view of the case is supported on grounds such as these: 1. Had he not been afraid, he would have told the whole truth; *but fear does not justify falsehood,* though it often occasions it. 2. What must the king have thought of a prophet of God so complaisant as this? 3. What would the princes say of his vaunted righteousness when they learnt how he had dealt with them? 4. Our Saviour and his apostles never did the like. 5. It had all the effect of a lie, since it left a false impression on the minds of those to whom he spoke. 6. The very fact that it needs laboured argument to justify it against our instinctive condemnation of it shows that it does not belong to the noble family of truth, etc. But *audi alteram partem.* Therefore note—

II. WHAT MAY BE URGED IN DEFENCE. 1. *In reference to the foregoing arguments.* The first *assumes* that there was no motive but fear. The second and third are assumptions also. The fourth is, to say the least, doubtful (cf. John vii. 8, 9; Acts xx. 20—26). Concerning the fifth, it is not true that *all* the effect of a lie, nor its worst effect, is that stated. And as to the sixth, it may be said that instinctive condemnations may be unjust as well as just. 2. *Other replies* to the charge against the prophet are: (1) He spoke no untruth. (2) Expediency, if not unlawful, is obligatory. (3) It has been ever recognized as lawful, under certain circumstances, to mislead an enemy; cf. Rahab's conduct (Josh. ii. 1) and its commendation (Heb. xi. 31; Jas. ii. 25). The commonly supposed case of a murderer asking you which way your friend has gone, in order that he may overtake and murder him; in such case, not only might you mislead, but would you not be bound to do so? 3. *There are sacred principles on which such suppression of the truth as Jeremiah's is justified.* (1) The right to truth may be forfeited, as the right to liberty and life may be forfeited, by wrong-doing. In the vast majority of cases men have a right to the truth, but in all the cases cited above they had no such right. (2) Truth is not an end in itself, but only a means to an end, which is the honour of God and the well-being of man; and there are occasions, doubtless very rare, when the end can only be secured by the sacrifice of the ordinary means. Therefore let all who presume to condemn great saints of God as guilty of lying, because they had no mere superstitious idolatry of veracity, as some have, hesitate before they bring such charge. Who are we to sit in judgment on such? But, on the other hand, let none pervert these reasonings, as the Jesuits did and many yet do, into a justification for lying and departing from the truth whenever it may be found convenient. It needs a healthy conscience to decide when these reasonings are applicable—a conscience enlightened by God's Spirit and animated by his love, and then such a one, and only such a one, may be left to do as he wills in cases like those we have considered.—C.

Ver. 4.—*Prophecy and patriotism.* I. THE ETHICS OF PATRIOTISM. Here are four men who go to the king with a complaint against Jeremiah; and in doing so they do not take low ground. Indeed, there are many people interested in affairs of state who would say they took very high ground. What sounds more plausible than to say that a whole country should never be more united than when the common enemy attacks it? Should there not at such a time be mutual encouragement, the bold and brave men of a state striving to animate all the citizens with their own ardour and resolution? Thus the whole question is opened up with respect to a man's allegiance to his country. How far does the claim extend of a country upon those who live under its laws, having their person and their property protected by these laws? That national history, great national events, patriotic feelings, have their place in the machinery of government, every Christian would allow; but it may not be so easy to settle exactly what that place is. Everything turns on what should have the first place in a man's affection, duty, and service; and so we have the example of Jeremiah here to guide us. He, a Jewish prophet, teaches us—

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II. THE FIRST DUTY OF A CHRISTIAN. From this world's point of view Jeremiah did an eminently unpatriotic thing. Instead of uniting the people into resistance, he, as it were, divided them into two classes. He made it a time for individual and not for common action. But, after all, in every conflict there comes a time for yielding; the attacking party must retire in failure, or the defending party submit in defeat. To Jeremiah it was given to see the certain result. He knew that not the Chaldeans but Jehovah himself had to be reckoned with. The first duty of a prophet was to Jehovah, and so for that matter was the first duty of every Israelite. Thus in the same way, the first duty of a Christian is to Christ. He who serves Christ most completely serves his country best. In such a service the Christian may be misrepresented, miscalled, stamped even as traitor, but that only means that he is called to pass through Jeremiah's experience here. Why, even a man of pagan Rome can teach us in this matter; for Cicero, in the fourth book of his 'De Officiis,' speaking of gradations of duty in the state, says that a citizen's first duty is to the immortal gods, and his second to his country. "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's."—Y.

Vers. 7—13.—*A friend in need.* I. THE NATIONALITY OF EBED-MELECH. An Ethiopian. Jeremiah had asked in prophecy, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin?" from which question we may assume that Ethiopians were well known in Israel. One cannot but feel that here we have a sort of counterpart to that other Ethiopian eunuch of whom we read in the New Testament. The Ethiopian Ebed-Melech helps Jeremiah in his temporal need; Philip helps the servant of Queen Candace in his spiritual need. What a rebuke there is here to bigoted and frenzied patriotism!—if, indeed, "patriotism" is the proper word to be used and not rather a spirit of blind nationality. Perhaps the very fact that Ebed-Melech was an *alien* helped him to see needs and duties, cruelty and injustice, which were hidden from the eyes of the natives. Even natives would be obliged to admit that Ebed-Melech could not be expected to look on the position with their traditionary eyes. Even so it was reserved for a Gentile to say at the Crucifixion, "Truly this was the Son of God."

II. THE HUMANITY OF EBED-MELECH. That the eunuch should have pitied the prophet sunk in the dungeon mire may not seem at first a matter to be singled out for special notice. Why should a man be praised for humanity more than for honesty? We must, however, recollect the difference of times. Those who put Jeremiah in the dungeon thought it served him quite right. And yet if there is nothing extraordinary in the humanity of Ebed-Melech, there must be something exceptionally fiendish in the conduct of those who put the prophet in the dungeon; whereas, in point of fact, they were only doing a usual thing. What a long time it has taken to work the world up even to its present attainments in humanity and compassionate feeling! And still through all these centuries Ebed-Melech rebukes us for our too often thoughtlessness and forgetfulness with respect to human pain.

III. THE COURAGE OF EBED-MELECH. He could not do a thing of this sort without making enemies and running into peril. The humane man has often to be a brave man, going into elements of danger for the sake of humanity, as a lifeboat crew must do, or a band of explorers in a colliery accident. But there are also exercises of humanity which demand moral courage—courage that will stand alone in protesting against cruelties and brutalities that have been accepted through long custom. If we are resolved to be consistent and thorough in our humanity, we must be prepared for ridicule and scorn. There are only too many who will check us in humane endeavours by calling them mere sentimentality and weakness.

IV. THE INFLUENCE OF EBED-MELECH. His office tells us that he was a man about the court, and his action here tells us that he was a man who had influence with the king. What we see of his conduct here makes us feel that he had won his influence in a perfectly legitimate way. Thus at last the opportunity comes for making good use of it. Here is an example of how good a thing it is to cultivate influence with those in authority, if it can be done in a right way without flattery and servility. Men like kings need some one near them to speak the truth plainly and effectually.

V. THE THOUGHTFULNESS OF EBED-MELECH. Something more is needed than the king's permission to get Jeremiah out of the dungeon. Probably his stay in a miry,

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pestilential hole had made him very feeble. Ebed-Melech was evidently a man who could take in all that needed to be done in any difficulty. Just the sort of man who could find usefulness in things that were cast away as worn out and useless. "Useless" is only our ignorant way of naming things we cannot use. The humane man must be thoughtful as well as courageous.—Y.

Ver. 20.—*Obeying the voice of the Lord.* I. GOD HAS A VOICE FOR THOSE IN DOUBT. Poor Zedekiah, king though he be, is in a state of great vacillation. Counsellors speak one thing, and a prophet speaks another. Counsellors proclaim continued and resolute resistance, though it is by no means plain that they believe in what they say, and from ver. 19 it is clear that there were very considerable divisions in the city. Jeremiah, on the other hand, speaks like a man who is perfectly sure of his ground. He was oftentimes wretched and depressed in his own heart, but never did he speak the message of Jehovah with a doubt as to whether it was a real message at all. The world abounds in doubters, coming continually to a place where two ways meet, and standing long in uncertainty and fear which way to take. And yet they are uncertain only because they do not see the direction which God has given. For even as at cross-roads finger-posts are put up to direct strangers, so God has his finger-posts for every doubtful traveller in the ways of terrestrial life. Zedekiah seems to have had a feeling that he was seeking in the right direction when he sent again to Jeremiah. He seems to have made himself ready to listen, without hinting that he expected some particular answer. So to speak, it was Zedekiah's last chance, and he gave the prophet the opportunity of speaking with corresponding plainness. And as God's Word is here, so it is everywhere, spoken with the utmost assurance and from the whole nature of the messenger.

II. THE VOICE CALLS TO IMMEDIATE OBEDIENCE. There is always some duty that lies nearest us. Part of the mischief of doubt is that, while we are doubting, some good thing is left undone, the opportunity for it passing away unused. There was just one thing for Zedekiah to do at this moment—go forth and surrender himself to the generals of the King of Babylon. Repentance and amendment of life—these were no longer available to avert the capture of Jerusalem. *That* was a thing settled on. But carnage and destruction might be averted by a timely surrender. Every day there is something made plain for us to do that day. It may be difficult, painful, in all ways hard to the flesh; but if it is neglected, then we shall only meet something still more painful to-morrow. "Obey the voice of the Lord, and it shall be well with thee," is a word to us all. The voice of self or the voice of others may hint at procrastination or at some qualified obedience. Our only safety is in attending to the clear and urgent voice from heaven. Paradox as it seems, the most difficult way is really the easiest, and the easiest the most difficult. Zedekiah did not attend to the prophet's imperative utterance, and the next chapter tells the dreadful things which happened. The king really made things worse by going out of his way to seek for direction, and then, when he had got it, paying no attention to it.—Y.

Ver. 23.—*The end of Zedekiah's irresolution.* Irresolution it may be called rather than disobedience. There is nothing to show that he had definitely made up his mind not to obey the voice of the Lord. In spite of the clear announcement made to him, he seems to have gone on, hoping against hope that some decisive disaster would overtake the Chaldeans. Yet Jeremiah closes his address by this sentence, so well calculated to bring even an irresolute man to decision: "Thou shalt cause this city to be burned with fire."

I. A DECLARATION OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY. Already in ver. 18 there is the declaration that the Chaldeans will burn the city with fire, and Zedekiah is well able to infer, if he likes, that this is a calamity he may prevent. But he is not left to inference. The prophet's exhortation goes on, maintaining its cogency and directness, and then in the last word he individually is made responsible. The sting of the address is emphatically in the tail. Zedekiah is now brought face to face with his obligations as a king. Jeremiah could not have said to any one else, "*Thou* shalt cause this city to be burned with fire," because no one else could have set in train the course of events which would avert such a calamity. Here is an example to teach those who are tempted to envy the grandeur of kings and the fame of such as

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are ruling men in a state. Zedekiah's decision affected not himself only, or a few people, but a whole city. The responsibility was further increased by his having sent for the prophet who said this very thing. It is not every ruler who at a critical moment has his way made so clear as was the way of Zedekiah here. How much in the way of preventing evil may depend on one single man!

II. MATTER IS FURNISHED TO EMBITTER THE REFLECTIONS OF THE FUTURE. Whether Zedekiah saw the blazing city we cannot be sure. If he did, what a pang for his heart to think that the city where he was king, in which he and his ancestors had taken such pride, was burning, through his want of decision at a critical time! He feared to do what looked unpatriotic, and in the end he virtually destroyed the city he might have saved.

III. THERE WAS A LIMIT TO ZEDEKIAH'S POWER OVER THE SITUATION. Truly it was a great deal for one man to be able to do—either to save a city from the flames or hand it over to them. But this power only looks great according to the standard given by temporal and superficial relations. An almost boundless area for human powers and opportunities lay altogether outside of Zedekiah's reach. As man is unable purely by his own effort to confer the highest benefits on his fellow-man, so he is also unable to inflict the worst evil. The worst evils are ever self-originated. Zedekiah did far more to hurt himself than any one else. Jeremiah had been charged to make it quite clear to every one that he who went forth to the Chaldeans should live.—Y.

Vers. 24—28.—*The unkingly position of a king.* I. THE PROFESSION OF A KINGLY ATTRIBUTE. The king holds the power of life and death. He can pardon without giving a reason. And Zedekiah maintains the name of this kingly right, even upon the very heels of Jeremiah's awful words. Such is the power of long-accepted habit and privilege. Did he really think that if Jeremiah published the conversation he had power to put him to death? Or did he think that such a suggestion would move the prophet in the least? Possibly he did; or more likely he was talking at random; or it may be that in these last decaying days of dignity he asserted, by a kind of instinct, all that was left him to assert. We know well that he had no real power over Jeremiah, for the Lord who had hidden his prophet before could hide him again (ch. xxxvi. 26). Pilate followed in the train of Zedekiah when he said to Jesus, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" (John xix. 10). This, then, is the first element in the unkingly position, that Zedekiah is professing what he cannot perform.

II. HE IS AFRAID OF THE LEADING MEN IN THE STATE. He will not rise independent of them, neither will he consult them. Instead of fearing Jehovah and trembling at the thought of what he has just heard, his soul is filled with the fear of men who probably derived their places from his own appointment. He shrinks from being forced to tell any of them that he has had to contemplate as a possibility a voluntary surrender to the Chaldeans. Truly it was quite time for a new order of things to rise in Jerusalem, even if it meant the destruction of a city. A true king would not have feared that his interview with a prophet of God should be known anywhere. Kings among men, those who are kings by nature and by the grandeur of their acts, fear no one but God. They act in the darkness just as if they were in the light; in private relations just as if they were in public. They never need to go begging and entreating people to conceal things.

III. HE IS A SUPPLIANT TO ONE OF HIS SUBJECTS. In the same breath he tells Jeremiah he shall not die and begs Jeremiah to grant him a favour. All at once he sets before this prophet, so straightforward and unreserved, a nice question of casuistry. With the suggestion of burning Jerusalem before him, he is thinking first on the present inconvenience to himself and providing a nice quibble to escape from it. Yet even here is a sign of God's bearing with him to the last. The request he makes, undignified as it is, is nevertheless one within the power of the prophet to grant. If Zedekiah feels it to be consistent with his regal dignity, Jeremiah feels it not inconsistent with his integrity. The impression we get from the whole conversation is that the torches of the Chaldeans did not come at all too soon.—Y.

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EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

This chapter is very confused as it stands. To restore order it is absolutely necessary to suppose that some passages (viz. vers. 1, 2, and vers. 4—13) have been inserted by after-thoughts. It is important to notice that the latter of these passages is omitted in the Septuagint. We need not go so far as to excise them altogether, but we must at any rate enclose them in parentheses. The chapter then becomes a narrative of the solemn session held by the Babylonian officers in the "middle gate," and the charge which they gave to Gedaliah to take Jeremiah under his protection. Vers. 1, 2 appear to be taken from 2 Kings xxv. 1—4 (= ch. lii. 4—7); vers. 4—10 to be shortened from 2 Kings xxv. 4—12 (= ch. lii. 7—16). It is difficult to believe that Jeremiah himself made these insertions, not merely because they interrupt the sense, but because they involve several historical difficulties. According to ch. xxxviii. 28, Jeremiah "abode in the court of the watch till the day that Jerusalem was taken;" but the *primâ facie* meaning of our vers. 13, 14 is that Nebuzar-adan sent to liberate Jeremiah, and yet, according to 2 Kings xxv. 8 (=ch. lii. 12), this officer did not arrive at Jerusalem till a month after its capture. Another difficulty is that, according to ver. 14, Jeremiah was set free by order of Nebuzar-adan, whereas ch. xl. 1—5 states distinctly that Jeremiah had been taken in fetters to Ramah, where he was liberated by Nebuzar-adan himself. Even if there should be some reasonable way of harmonizing these various statements (see especially below on ver. 14), yet is it likely that Jeremiah himself used such inconsistent language? Still, the notice in vers. 11, 12 is in itself not improbable, and the spelling "Nebuchadrezzar" separates it from the rest of the passage (vers. 4—13); it is possible, therefore, that, in spite of its omission in the Septuagint (which wrongly retains vers. 1, 2), they are the work of Jeremiah.

Ver. 3.—**And all the princes**, etc.; rather, *That all the princes*, etc. (see on ch. xxxviii. 28). The fact mentioned in this verse is not recorded in 2 Kings xxv.; ch. lii.; and its preciseness is a considerable pledge of its accuracy. The princes are four in number, and two of them have official titles attached. **Nergal-sharezer** is the Hebraized form of Nirgal-sarra-uçur, *i.e.* "Nirgal (or Nergal), protect (or perhaps, has created) the king"—the name, as often, is a prayer. **Samgar-nebo** is probably a modification of Sumgir-nabu, "Be gracious, Nebo;" but it has not yet been found in the inscriptions. **Sarsechim** has the appearance of being corrupt; the first part, however, may, perhaps, be the Babylonian for "king" ("prince" in Hebrew). **Rab-saris** has a meaning in Hebrew—"chief of the eunuchs;" but the analogies of "Rab-mag" and "Rab-shakeh" suggest that it is merely the Hebraized form of some Assyrian title. In any case, it would be better to render "the Rab-saris," and to attach it closely to the preceding name, Sarsechim being himself the official called Rab-saris (see, however, ver. 13). **Rab-mag.** This was "one of the highest titles in the state" (G. Smith). The etymology of the latter half of the phrase is uncertain; for the connection of "mag" with "Magi" is a mistake which has been exposed by Dr. Schrader, in his work, 'Die Keilinschriften und das Alte Testament' (of which a translation is announced). The native form of the name may be *rubu emga* (Schrader) or *rubu mākhē* (Friedr. Delitzsch), and the whole title will mean "high priest" or "chief of the sorcerers" (comp. Delitzsch, "The Hebrew Language viewed in the Light of Assyrian Research," Lond., 1883, p. 14). "*The* Rab-mag" would be more accurate, and the title ought to be attached to the preceding name, Nergal-sharezer. As a matter of fact, a Nirgal-sarra-uçur, who held the office of *rubu emga*, is mentioned in the cuneiform inscriptions, and we may plausibly conjecture that he is the person here mentioned among the "princes." He was afterwards raised to the throne by the conspirators who murdered Evil-merodach, the son of Nebuchadnezzar (he is better known as Neriglissar). It is singular that two Nergal-sharezers should be here mentioned; possibly the first mention is due to a mistake. The names are hardly recognizable in the Septuagint. The "princes" took up their station in the middle gate. The "breach" spoken of in ver. 2 enabled the Babylonians to occupy the whole of the lower city to the north-east of Zion. The "middle gate" probably separated these two parts of Jerusalem, and

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those who were posted there commanded the temple and the citadel.

Ver. 4.—Here begins the second parenthesis, to be read apart from the principal, though shorter, narrative (see introduction to chapter). Observe elsewhere in the Book of Jeremiah events known from other sources are only briefly referred to (comp. ch. xxix. 2; xxxii. 1—5; xxxiv. 1, 7; xxxv. 11; xxxvii. 5); see 2 Kings xxv. 4—12.

Ver. 9.—**Nebuzar-adan**; *i.e. Nabu-zira-iddina*, "Nebo gave a seed."

Ver. 13.—**Nebushasban.** The name occurs in a list of proper names, under the form *Nabu-sizibanni*, "Nebo, rescue me!" It is remarkable that a different name is given to the Rab-saris in ver. 3; and the conjecture is not unreasonable that Sarsechim is a corruption of the latter part of the name Nebushasban. In ver. 3 the Septuagint has *Nabus*achar instead of Sarsechim (other copies read Nabusarsechim).

Ver. 14.—Gedaliah, whose father had already befriended the prophet on a serious occasion (ch. xxvi. 24), and who, according to ch. xl. 5, had been appointed (though himself a Jew) Babylonian "governor over the cities of Judah," is directed to carry him (Jeremiah) home, or rather, *into the house*; obviously some house close by is meant—either Gedaliah's temporary dwelling or the royal palace. This statement conflicts (see introduction) with that in ch. xl. 1—5, but only as to the time when Jeremiah was liberated. The latter narrative being more explicit, deserves the preference. Thus Jeremiah dwelt among the people; *i.e.* could go in and out at his pleasure.

Vers. 15—18.—A prophecy to Ebed-melech is here introduced, which, though uttered previously (see ch. xxxviii.), could not have been mentioned before without breaking the sequence of events. For came, we might render *had come*.

Ver. 16.—**Go and speak.** Ebed-melech must be supposed to come into the court of the watch, so that Jeremiah might communicate with him.

Ver. 18.—**For a prey unto thee.** The same remarkable phrase in ch. xxi. 9; xxxviii. 2.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1, 2.—(See homily on ch. lii. 4—7.)

Vers. 4—7.—(See homily on ch. lii. 8—11.)

Vers. 8—10.—(See homily on ch. lii. 8—16.)

Vers. 11, 12.—*A prophet befriended by a heathen king.* Rumours of Jeremiah's efforts to induce the Jews to submit to the Babylonian power must have reached the ears of Nebuchadnezzar, and have led him to regard the prophet with favour. If his fellow-countrymen considered Jeremiah to be a traitor, it was natural that the Chaldeans should think he was on their side. Both parties were ignorant of the motives and aims of the prophet, which were as patriotic as they were prudent. But, though perhaps from an undue opinion of his friendliness to them, the invaders did a real service to Jeremiah, and that was good on its own account.

I. GOD BRINGS DELIVERANCE TO HIS CHILDREN IN THEIR GREATEST DANGER. Jeremiah was a prisoner. Jerusalem was given over to the rapine of a lawless soldiery. Then came the prophet's escape.

II. GOD CAN USE THE MOST UNLIKELY MEANS AS INSTRUMENTS OF HIS GRACE. He does use means, delivering through the action of men overruled by his providence. Such is his wise and mighty control that fierce despots may be his angels and ministers of grace.

III. THE SCOURGE OF JUDGMENT FOR THE WICKED MAY BE THE ARM OF DELIVERANCE TO GOD'S PEOPLE. Nebuchadnezzar was the fearful foe whose approach had been foreshadowed as the advent of doom and ruin to the guilty city of Jerusalem. This man was the friend and deliverer of Jeremiah. So the awful judgment at the end of the world will be, to the Christian, the occasion of the "salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." The greatest evils in the world are overruled to work the good of God's children.

IV. A HEATHEN MAY BE AN EXAMPLE OF HUMANENESS TO MEN WHO PROFESS THE HIGHEST RELIGION. There is no cruelty so bitter as that of persons who call themselves enlightened and religious. This is the most refined and heartless cruelty. *Corruptio optimi pessima.* On the other hand, with all that is brutal and lawless, there may be a

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genuine unsophisticated kindliness among men who are in great moral and religious darkness. Let us thank God that he has not left himself without a witness in the conscience even of a Nebuchadnezzar.

V. IF A HEATHEN KING'S FAVOUR IS VALUABLE, HOW SHALL WE ESTIMATE THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE FAVOUR OF THE DIVINE KING? If Jeremiah profited by the patronage of Nebuchadnezzar, what shall the grace of Christ be to us? If the prophet found release and comfort at the approach of the Babylonian monarch, what greater good is in store for those who shall "behold the King in his beauty"? Jeremiah was protected by Nebuchadnezzar, but he did not put his trust in the human monarch. The one safe trust is in the one true Prince and Saviour.

Vers. 15—18.—*Spared on the ground of faith.* I. THE MAN. 1. He is an *Ethiopian.* "God is no respecter of persons." This man, with his heathen nationality, his negro countenance, and his humiliated state, is selected for deliverance in the general destruction, because in him is found the right spiritual condition, whilst men with the pure blood of Abraham in their veins perish. We have not to wait for St. Paul to teach us the breadth of God's grace and the spirituality of its requirements. 2. He is a *court servant.* There were Christians in Cæsar's household. A king's favour is no substitute for the grace of God. Ebed-Melech felt that he needed more than the protection of the royal guard, even when all was fair in the outside world. 3. He stands *alone.* He is alone in his faith. So much the more real and vital must his faith be. He is alone in his reward. A special message and a special promise are accorded to this man. God does not overlook any solitary servant of his. All religion is individual—individual faith, individual grace.

II. THE FAITH. Ebed-Melech had befriended Jeremiah. Yet it is remarkable that this fact is not mentioned here. His act of kindliness by itself would not have been enough to have secured him a Divine promise of special safety. But the act evinced faith. It is implied that Ebed-Melech befriended Jeremiah because he had faith in God, and therefore acknowledged the Divine message of the prophet and accepted the truth of it. We are saved on account of our faith. Faith must show itself in deeds or it is dead and worthless. But the personal trust in God and in Christ is the sole and universal condition through which God's mercy is bestowed.

III. THE REWARD. Ebed-Melech is to be spared in the general wreck of the Jewish state. His presence in the scene of destruction will enhance his sense of the providential character of his escape. We must all revolt from the heartless doctrine of Thomas Aquinas, that one of the elements of the joy of the redeemed in heaven will be the contemplation of the agonies of the lost. Nevertheless, to have escaped from a terrible fate that has been brought very near to us is a source of greater joy than never to have known danger. This is the Christian's condition. He can have only pain in witnessing the suffering of others. But he has large ground for thankfulness when he sees how near he was to ruin, and how God has plucked him as a brand from the burning.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 9, 10.—*The poor better off than the rich.* I. IN WHAT SENSE THEY WERE SO. 1. *They were spared because of their insignificance.* 2. *Pitied because of their helplessness and privations.* 3. *Their condition could hardly be altered otherwise than for the better.*

II. OF WHAT THESE WERE THE TYPE. 1. They represent the *meek* who inherit the earth, and the *poor in spirit* whose is the kingdom of heaven. Christ the Conqueror will enrich them. 2. *Their fortune represented the law of reversal in the kingdom of God.* The first shall be last, and the last first; but not universally. "*Many* that are first," etc. Christ's servants will be most numerous amongst the poor and the despised. They will be recognized and honoured by him, when others are put to shame. But it will not be their *poverty*, but the *virtues of their poverty*, which shall be rewarded. They who know themselves poor will receive all things at his hands (cf. Rev. iii. 17, 18).—M.

Vers. 11—14.—(cf. ch. xl. 1—6).—*God's servant delivered from the judgment of*

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transgressors. The whole proceedings in connection with Jeremiah's deliverance are striking and noteworthy. It is a heathen prince to whose care and respect he owes his liberation, when his own people have treated him so cruelly. Very evident is the hand of God "disposing the hearts of princes," and making "all things work together for good to them that love him."

I. JEREMIAH'S EXCEPTIONAL CASE SHOWED THAT, IN THE MIDST OF THE MOST TERRIBLE CALAMITIES, GOD IS FREE TO WORK OUT THE PEACEABLE ENDS AND GRACIOUS REWARDS OF HIS KINGDOM. He was but one out of the entire nation, and might easily have been overlooked. Indeed, his sympathetic brotherliness had all but destroyed the advantage so specially designed for him. An interposition like this, so marked and resolute, had an evidently supernatural origin, and bore a moral or spiritual character. If his welfare could be so thoroughly and carefully attended to in the midst of such heart-rending and widely disastrous circumstances, the whole of the political changes then taking place must have been a portion of the moral order of the world, and under the direct superintendence of God. In the midst of judgment he remembers and pursues his merciful schemes. The darkest hour of a nation's or an individual's history is charged with ministries of light, and the most awful judgments do not interfere with the persistent will of God to save and to bless mankind. And how nicely adjusted and delicately balanced are the deserts of saints and transgressors!

II. SOME OF THE PURPOSES TO BE SERVED BY THIS PROVIDENCE. 1. *It showed that the calamity did not arise from a mere necessity or accident of circumstances.* Even the heathen Nebuchadnezzar learnt that. 2. *Spiritual guidance and comfort were secured for those left behind.* 3. *Jeremiah learnt to perceive and obey the Divine will as respected his future.* His sallies from Jerusalem proved how needful the lesson. 4. *God commended his love to his servant in making good accrue to him in the general evil of the time.* 5. *The reverence to God and consideration towards his prophet shown by heathen princes put to shame the unbelief and disobedience of the chosen people.*—M.

Ver. 14.—"*So he dwelt among the people.*" In how many respects was Jeremiah a type of Christ! And just in these points was he an example to the spiritual worker and the Christian preacher.

I. THE POSITION OF THE TRUE PASTOR. 1. How miserably anomalous—a pastor without a flock, or living at a distance from them! There is something wrong with one or other when they remain apart. Only now and then, and for brief periods, can solitude be the place of duty. 2. The cure of souls can only be followed successfully by constant intercourse with them. The experience, sympathy, and moral influence acquired by the minister in the midst of his flock will stand him in good stead in directing him as to what to teach, and preparing for it a favourable reception.

II. THE SPIRIT OF THE TRUE PASTOR. 1. *Absence of ambition.* The promises of the Chaldeans were much more brilliant than the future that was likely to lie before him in Palestine. It was not comfort, worldly emolument, or personal advancement that he sought. Like Moses, he chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. xi. 25). 2. *Sympathy with the miseries and spiritual needs of men.* The interests of the Divine kingdom would be better served by his remaining at home. Here was work ready to his hand, and he dare not leave it. The servant of God has "to preach as a dying man to dying men." 3. *True patriotism.* What intense affection he had for the land of his fathers! This was at the very core of the religion of the ancient Jew. All the promises of God and realizations of his kingdom on earth seemed to be associated with the Holy Land. This sentiment has been universalized and made more personal by the Spirit of Jesus. "Our kind" must have our constant care and prayers. "The enthusiasm for humanity" must support and inspire the spiritual worker.—M.

Vers. 15—18.—*Faith's reward.* I. IN BEING ACKNOWLEDGED. 1. *The character of its work recognized.* Jeremiah is to speak in the Name of "the God of *Israel*," as if to say that henceforth Ebed-Melech is to be regarded as a true Israelite, having his destiny bound up with God's people. That which he did is attributed to no merely passing compassion, but to *faith*: "Thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord." So God perceives the secret motives of actions. 2. *In being further and specially exercised.*

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Definite direction is given to the attention of Ebed-Melech, and he is encouraged to look forward to the fulfilment of the words spoken by Jeremiah. As a further confirmation of his share in the Divine events about to take place, he is assured of personal safety—an assurance as yet only a matter of faith and not of sight. One of the surest proofs of true faith being acknowledged by God, is its being thus tested and exercised. Men without faith may be let alone; but the believer, even if his faith be as a grain of mustard seed, will be taken hold of by the providence and grace of God, and led "from faith to faith." Those who trust in him he will reward with his confidence and the custody of his mysteries. "Lord, increase our faith."

II. IN BEING VERIFIED. 1. *The believer will see the fulfilment of what he has believed.* He will be honoured by being made a witness of the truth of God. The moral tendencies and spiritual consummations that make up the kingdom of God in the world will be revealed. Experience will illustrate and confirm faith, and faith will interpret experience and render it spiritually profitable. 2. *He himself will be saved from the destiny of the wicked.* This is "the physical and palpable reward of faith;" but it is also one which may open up the way to future spiritual blessedness. Ebed-Melech is obviously spared, not only from the suffering of the exile, but from the degrading influences of it, and the rejection from covenant blessings it, in so many instances, involved. Those who "receive a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward."—M.

Vers. 1—8.—*The retribution of God.* What an accumulation of woe do the eight verses with which this chapter opens present! Let thought dwell on the several statements made here, and let imagination seek to realize what they must have meant to those upon whom the calamities they speak of came; and it will be seen, in vivid lurid light, that the retribution of God upon sin and sinners has been in the past no mere empty threat, and it will lead to the salutary suggestion, so questioned now, that his like threatened retribution in the future is no empty threat either. How unreasonable, in the face of historic facts such as those told of here, and in the face of actual facts of to-day in which dread suffering and awful calamity are seen overtaking wicked doers, to doubt that God will do the like again should necessity arise! But yet many do doubt and deny the teachings of God's Word on this matter. Note, therefore—

I. THE GROUNDS ON WHICH THIS TRUTH IS QUESTIONED. They are such as these: 1. *Death ends all.* But who can prove this? Why is it less possible that we should live in another condition than that we should have been born into the one in which we now are? Resurrection is not antecedently more incredible than creation. 2. *God too merciful.* But is he? Does he not do or suffer to be done fearful things now? 3. *Retribution comes in this world.* In part it does to some, but to others sin seems one long success. 4. *Christ's death atones for all.* Yes, but in what sense? Certainly not in the sense of saving from suffering now. Why, then, if the conditions of salvation be not fulfilled, should the atonement avail hereafter more than now?

II. THE PROBABLE MOTIVES OF THIS DENIAL. Not irresistible conviction or any satisfactory knowledge of the falsity of what is denied, but such as these: 1. *The desire that the doctrine denied should not be true.* How often in questions like these the wish is father to the thought! Our opinions follow the line of our interest. 2. *The belief that the doctrine renders impossible men's love and trust in God.* Without question there are and have been settings forth of this doctrine which to all thoughtful minds must have this effect. The conception that God has created—of course, knowingly—myriads of human souls to sin and suffer for ever is one that must darken the face of God to the thoughtful soul. Why, it will almost passionately be asked—"Why, if it were so much better that they should never have been born, were they born?" It is "he, the Lord, that hath made us, and not we ourselves." But we are not shut up to such conception. God "*will* have all men to be saved;" still through what fiery disciplines may he not have to compel the perverse and unruly wills of sinful men to pass ere they shall come to themselves and say, "I will arise," etc.? 3. *Atheistic, agnostic, or materialistic.* They who come under such names alike will dislike such doctrine as this. They will not simply disbelieve, but protest against them.

III. THE SUCCESS, SUCH AS IT IS, THAT THESE DENIALS HAVE HAD. 1. They have dulled and sometimes deadened the fear of the Lord in many souls. But: 2. They have never been able to convince any that there is no judgment to come. The dread

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of it haunts them still, the evidence for it being too strong and clear. Hamlet's soliloquy, "To be or not to be, that is the question," etc., still expresses men's fear of death. "For in that sleep of death what dreams may come!" 3. It is difficult to see aught of good that has been done—nothing but more or less ill. Therefore note—

IV. THE WARNING THAT COMES TO US FROM THESE DENIALS. Cherish a deep and holy fear of God. Judge each one ourselves, that we be not judged of the Lord.—C.

Vers. 4—7.—*Too late.* These verses tell of the flight of Zedekiah and his miserable capture by the Chaldean army. *Picture the scene.* The breach made in the wall. The dead hour of night. The rush upon the temple. The slaughter there. The alarm spreading to the palace. The attempted escape, before dawn, of the king, his wives, and his children. See them muffled, disguised, laden with such precious things as they could snatch up in the hurry of that awful moment, stealthily making their way along the narrow alley between the walls, speeding down the ravine, up over the slopes of Olivet, then down again to the plains of Jericho, where they were overtaken and made prisoners. Many an opportunity of escape had been given to Zedekiah during these last months and previously, but he had neglected them all. For a while his present attempt seemed successful, but he was soon in the cruel grasp of the Chaldeans, and then worse than all he had feared came upon him. He tried to escape, but *too late.* This history, unutterably sad as it is, has many parallels and much instruction. Consider—

I. INSTANCES IN WHICH THIS VERDICT OF "TOO LATE" IS APPLICABLE. There are many. 1. *Scriptural.* No doubt that not a few, when the Lord had shut Noah in the ark, and they saw the lowering clouds, the overwhelming rain, and the rising waters, repented and sought safety in the ark. But then, because they had been "sometime disobedient" (cf. 1 Pet. iii. 19), they were now too late. "Remember Lot's wife." The Israelites after their repulse at Ai; after their disbelief of the faithful spies (Numb. xiv. 44). Our Lord's words to Jerusalem, "But now they are hid from thine eyes." The foolish virgins (Matt. xxv.). Cf. also "When once the master of the house has risen up and shut to the door," etc. 2. *Historic.* Archias, magistrate of Greece, revelling and feasting. Plot formed to assassinate. A friend sends intelligence. Arrives as feast is going on. "Serious things to-morrow," said the senseless man. That night he was slain. The massacre of Glencoe would never have occurred but for the tardiness of the chief of the clan in giving in his submission to the government. A snowstorm hindered him when at last he did set out for this purpose, and the last day of grace came and ended, and the chief's submission had not been made. The massacre followed (cf. Macaulay). 3. And in *less notable events* in common everyday life, how perpetually are we seeing like instances! School life wasted, no making it up again. Opportunities in business, in the home, in the Church, missed; above all, in regard to the life eternal,—and not recoverable. The tide in the affairs of men *not* taken at the flood; instead of fortune, the few ships which men have launched lie wrecked or stranded on the shore. "Too late!" With what disappointment and despair is this often said, and will it be said hereafter, and with what truth as well! Therefore note—

II. THE MISERY OF HIM WHO IS TOO LATE. This arises from: 1. *Shame before men.* They will not pity, but despise and blame. 2. *Sting of conscience.* We know it might have been otherwise; we might have secured what we have let go. 3. *Sight of the consequences* brought on ourselves and others through our neglect. 4. The *irrecoverability* of what is lost. It can never be all the same to any soul, no matter what theory of the future we may hold, if he has thrown away opportunities of grace and squandered the days of salvation with which he was blessed. This thought, that he was "too late," was the "torment" of the rich man in the hell into which God sent his soul after death.

III. HOW COME MEN TO BE TOO LATE? Sometimes it is: 1. *The opportunity passes away.* The tide which should have been taken at the flood has begun to ebb. 2. Yet more often, *the power of the law of habit.* Opportunities may be plentiful, but the habit of resisting the call to use them has become fixed, and therefore it it really "too late" for the man, even when he might if he would seize upon them for his good. We sing—

"And while the lamp holds out to burn,
The vilest sinner may return."

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Yes, no doubt; but will he? If he has got so into the habit of saying "No" to God will he—is it likely?—at the last turn and say, "Yes"? Death-bed repentances!—are there any such things? That which determines a soul's destiny is not death, but this law of habit. Long before death it may have been settled whether that soul shall be saved or lost. And death may come, as it does to the young, and the matter be not settled, the law of habit not having had time to declare itself whilst life in the body lasted. The law of habit, not the hour of death, is that from which we have most to hope and most to fear. 3. *The gambling spirit that is in all men.* The trusting to chance, the hope in good luck, in regard to things secular; the hope for a more convenient season in regard to the things of the soul. There is this spirit in us all. It has its uses, for there are "ventures of faith" as well as all too many ventures of a very different kind. Read this history of King Zedekiah, and see how he gambled away his crown, his kingdom, his life, his all.

IV. SAFEGUARDS AGAINST THIS EVIL. Under God, this same law of habit of which we have spoken. Resolve, and strengthen your resolve by prayer, that you will not put off till to-morrow what you should do to-day. Act on it, and to-morrow you shall act on it again, and the next day, and so the blessed habit shall be formed of practically remembering that "*now* is the accepted time," and for you or by you the miserable verdict of "too late" shall never have to be pronounced.—C.

Ver. 10.—"*Blessed are ye poor.*" The Chaldean invasion, which wrought such ruin on princes, nobles, and all the great in Judah and Jerusalem, had far other and happier effect on the poor. The storm which tore down the lofty tree left the lowly flowers that nestled amid the herbage untouched. This verse recalls—

I. OUR LORD'S WORDS, "BLESSED ARE YE POOR." The poor do not excite the wrath of the great. They are least affected by outward change. They are dealt kindly by when the rich and great are cast down. "He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted," etc. But, chief of all, because they are "rich in faith." So said our Lord; and it can only be that the poor have an undying conviction of the love of God, an unquenchable faith therein, that they so patiently endure the ills of their present lot. Let that faith die out, as it has in some places and generations, and murderous revolution and anarchy burst forth. Our Lord distinctly encouraged this belief in the love of God towards the poor. He said his mission was "to preach the gospel to the poor." In the parable of the rich man, Lazarus, for no other reason than that he was poor, receiving here, as is the lot of the poor so often, only "evil things," was "carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." And we may well believe that they who here have been unable by reason of the misery of their condition to see that God is love—as Israel in Egypt could not believe in it by reason of the bitterness of spirit which their bondage caused them—shall in some blessed Abraham's bosom hereafter see it clearly, and then shall their hearts go out towards God in that faith and love which are the conditions of the kingdom of heaven, but which have been scarce possible to them here. Therefore are the poor blessed. But this verse teaches also the sure truth—

II. "HE THAT IS DOWN NEED FEAR NO FALL." Here it was lowliness of position which saved the poor of the land. But the proverb is yet more true where the lowliness is of the heart and mind—that yoke of Christ which, if we take, then rest, the undisturbed peace of the soul, is our reward.

III. THE COMMON PROVERB, "IT IS AN ILL WIND THAT BLOWS NO ONE ANY GOOD." The prince's ruin was the poor man's riches; the noble's downfall his uprising. Therefore in our own troubles let us remember that we are never as a target at which the arrows of God's judgments are aimed, and in the hitting of which their purpose is fulfilled; but rather are we the channels of blessing, which by and through us shall flow on to do good to others, perhaps many others. Cf. Paul's allegory, the casting out of the natural branch, the Jew, and the ingrafting of the wild branch, the Gentile. And illustrations are innumerable.

IV. GOD'S LAW OF COMPENSATIONS. If he takes away on the one side, he gives on the other. These poor people were favoured.

V. THE FIRST BEATITUDE, "BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT: FOR," etc. These poor had lands in Judæa; the poor Christ speaks of shall receive "the kingdom of heaven."

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It is not always true that the literal poor are dealt with in the way told of here, but the recompense of the poor in spirit never fails. They have an earnest of it in the rest and peace of soul it is theirs to enjoy now amid all the cares and distractions of this life. But no man makes himself poor; he must be made so. God's providence sends the literal poverty, God's Spirit that spiritual condition to which is promised the kingdom of heaven. But if we place ourselves in the hands of Christ, surrendering ourselves to be dealt with as he sees fit, he will, by his Spirit, bring us to that blessed mind without which none enter the kingdom, but with which we assuredly shall.—C.

Vers. 11—14.—*Churchwardens.* 1. These are *generally chosen from the friends of the Church*, as they who are to defend and guard the Church's interests should be. Who should care for the Church if not her friends? 2. But sometimes *men who are no friends of the Church have charge of her interests.* 3. And not seldom *they are amongst her best servants*, and do their work diligently and well. 4. In these verses *we have a signal instance* of this. Here is the fierce, heathen, Israel-destroying Nebuchadnezzar, busying himself seriously about the safety of God's prophet Jeremiah. It is not simply a case of God shutting the lions' mouths, but constituting the lions his servant's sure though strange defence (cf. ver. 12). "Is Saul also among the prophets?"—that was thought to be a marvel. But that the Chaldean monarch should be the faith's defender and the prophet's guard is no less strange. 5. And there have been *other such instances* before and since this. See what Egypt was to Joseph and Moses, the Philistines to David, the Persians to Daniel, Greece to Jews in Alexandria, Rome to Paul; see also history of the Lollards, Reformers, etc. And how often in the straits of God's people have they had to confess that he has raised up for them from most unlikely sources the helpers they have needed! "The barbarous people showed us no little kindness" (Acts xxviii. 2),—as we have seen sometimes a weak, defenceless creature dwelling in the same cage with strong, cruel beasts, and not only unharmed, but protected by them. 6. *How is all this to be explained?* In this instance of Jeremiah the motives of Nebuchadnezzar are clear and comprehensible. Jeremiah had done his best to persuade his countrymen to submit to Babylon. His influence would be strong with the captives in Babylon and serviceable to her monarch. The king would show that, whilst he punished his foes, he did not forget his friends. The reverence and awe which Jeremiah, so evidently God's prophet, aroused in the monarch's mind. But: 7. *He was guarded of God.* Jeremiah was no partisan of Babylon. The most terrible prophecies against her are his (cf. ch. l.). No other explanation than that the care of God was over him can account for their favour to one who spoke so plainly and so evil concerning them. And their forbearance is the more remarkable when we remember the proud, cruel, and arrogant character of the monarch whom Jeremiah thus, as it were, defied. 8. *Many and most helpful are the lessons of such facts as these.* Enemies God can make our friends, perils our protectors; and because "the Lord's portion is his people," his will is ever to do them good. Such deliverances as these are designed to foreshadow our final and perfect deliverance, and to deepen our confidence in regard thereto.—C.

Vers. 15—18.—"*In that ye ministered to the saints.*" "God," says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "is not unrighteous to forget" such ministry. It is a strong expression, and seems to imply that God would be unrighteous if he did forget. Here, in the story of Ebed-Melech, we have an instance of God's rewarding ministry to his saints. For what Ebed-Melech did, cf. ch. xxxviii. 7, etc. For his recompense, see these verses (15—18). Consider—

I. THESE RECOMPENSES. They are: 1. *A fact.* How many instances there are!—the widow of Sarepta; the Shunammite woman; Dorcas; Paul's friends, Onesiphorus, etc.; Jonathan; Mary of Bethany; Cyrus and the Persian nation, for their goodness to Israel; the people of Malta (Acts xxviii.); our own country, for offering asylum to persecuted Hollanders and Huguenots. And, besides such instances, there are repeated declarations to the same effect: "I will bless them that bless thee;" "They shall prosper that love thee." The cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple "shall in no wise lose its reward." "Whoso shall receive one such little child in my Name receiveth me." 2. *Very great.* (Cf. illustrations given.) How comparatively slight was the ministry! how cup of cold water-like! yet how great the reward! How much

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this country owes, in her commerce, her character, her fame, to her ministry to God's saints! Many people denounce Cromwell for most things he did, but all applaud his interference with the bloody papists on behalf of the persecuted Waldenses. Milton's grand lines, "Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints," etc., have immortalized that deed as it deserved. No, indeed; "God is not unrighteous to forget," rather is he most gracious to remember, all such ministries. 3. *Varied.* Sometimes the recompense is given at the time, in tangible, material blessing. Sometimes such recompense is delayed, but comes afterwards in full measure. Sometimes it comes not here at all in outward recompense, but in spiritual joy and peace—sunshine in the soul, approval of conscience, gladness of heart, confirmation in good. But for all, and most of all, in eternity. "That is the great harvest-season of holy and benignant deeds." "They shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." But: 4. *Ever sure.* They *shall* be recompensed. None of that good seed shall fall on other than good ground, or yield other than bountiful and beneficent fruit. The little gift "shall *by no means*," saith our Saviour, "lose its reward." And his many present recompenses all confirm our faith in the truth of that blessed Word.

II. THEIR REASONS. Some of them are probably such as these: 1. *For the Lord's own sake.* Such ministries demonstrate the presence in the heart of that which he most of all prizes—love. They show "some good thing toward the Lord God." They delight the Father's heart, and his smile cannot be concealed nor his hand held back from blessing. 2. *For the sake of those who thus minister*, as Ebed-Melech did. God recompenses them because they have thus committed themselves on the side of righteousness, and he would encourage them. 3. *For the sake of those ministered to.* God blessing their friends tends to raise up friends for them, as they often need. "We will go with you, for we see that the Lord is with you." 4. *For the sake of truth and righteousness generally.* God, by such recompenses, makes it evident on which side he is. Thus he cheers his people, dismays his adversaries, decides the waverer, and so advances the good cause in the world.

III. THEIR ADMONITION. Follow the Lord's example; do not *you* forget those who have stood up for truth and right. Sympathize with, applaud, defend such. *Be such yourselves.* Would you have done as Ebed-Melech did? Do you when the Christian lad or girl is jeered at by godless comrades, in the school, the counting-house, the shop, the kitchen? "Stand up, stand up, for Jesus!"—C.

Vers. 1—8.—*Siege and savagery.* I. THE MANNER IN WHICH THE CAPTURE OF JERUSALEM IS RELATED. Just enough is told to certify to us the complete and exact fulfilment of prophecy. There is a long siege, a great destruction, and great humiliation and suffering for the captured king. It is no part of the province of Scripture writers to dwell on war, battle, siege, and pillage for the sake of making striking narratives. But behind this very brevity what room there is for imagination! What suffering, gradually mounting to the climax of famine and thirst, during those eighteen months of siege! The very natural advantages of Jerusalem, enabling the people to resist longer, added to their calamities. Indeed, we may say that when a man employs his natural strength wrongly, his suffering in the end is not unlikely to be proportioned somewhat to his strength. A weaker man would not suffer so much or suffer so long.

II. THE SAVAGERY CONNECTED WITH THE CAPTURE. This savagery is a point to be studied as throwing a light on the ancient civilizations. Nobody thought, we may safely say, not even prophets themselves, that there was anything out of the way in all this destruction. Savagery was the accepted consequence of a successful siege. Jehovah used these Chaldean soldiers as instruments, but they had to act according to their individuality. A Roman army would have behaved no better. Indeed, humanity in war is a Christian idea. Paradox as it seems, God was working through the very savagery of this war to destroy all war. Men will fight; they will foment discord and accumulate large armies; but it is the glory of God to bring good out of all the conflicts. When the reign of the Prince of peace is fully come, then we shall see, as we cannot see now, the good that men have worked, *unconsciously*, by war. We are deceived now because we cannot get away from our thoughts physical destruction and suffering.

III. THE FATE OF ZEDEKIAH. Brought on him by his own indecision as much as by

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the savage hands of Chaldeans. If these verses stood by themselves, we should not know this; but we do know it from the record going before, of Jeremiah's dealings with him.—Y.

Ver. 10.—"*The poor of the people.*" I. How they had come into this position. Poverty is, of course, a mischief, having many causes, and no fallacy is greater than that of singling out one cause for some particular reason, and then treating it as if it were the only cause. Still, there is need that in this place the injustice of the rich towards the poor should be remembered. The fact that there are proverbs bearing on this point shows that such oppression was not at all unfrequent. "He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want" (Prov. xxii. 16; xxviii. 15). And now these oppressors had attracted to themselves the desiring eye of Babylon. Why were the rich men carried away and the poor left? The chief reason was that they heightened the triumph, for when despoiled they were just as poor as the poorest, and the contrast between their former and present state spoke for itself. Then, too, there is something in considering the rich men as themselves part of their riches. Thus the rich and poor are brought together in one great judicial act, and the rich are made to feel that in the end the poor are really better off than they are.

II. The advantages of poverty. Poverty usually presents such disadvantages on the surface, and so demands sympathy and help, that it almost seems like irony ever to talk of its advantages. And yet, if there be such advantages, it is very necessary to consider them, in order to do something for the prevention of envy, repining, and perplexity. As with the advantages of external wealth, so with the disadvantages of external poverty; neither goes very deep. In the time of spoliation the poor man can look on with a light heart, so far as personal loss is concerned. Probably the poor people of Israel were now better off than they had been for years. Amid all the burning and pillage here is one good effect already perceptible in the benefit that is being worked for the poor. Without contradiction, it may be affirmed that the Jehovah of the Old Testament and the Father of Jesus Christ in the New are alike on the side of the poor. All oppression of the poor, all unfair treatment of them, all selfish employment of them, will show in the end that the poor need lose nothing of what is best.

III. The employment of the poor. They were employed in that which was of greatest moment to them. Vineyards and fields were given to them—things they could all make use of; things which would repay their toil, and give them the chance of building up a really honourable wealth. If Nebuzar-Adan had given them something of the plunder, it would not have been near so useful as what he actually did give. Man is nearest to the pure, untainted fulness of nature when he is cultivating the soil.—Y.

Vers. 11—14.—*The safety of God's prophet.* I. The manner in which it is assured. There is no working of miracle, though miracle was available if it had been needed. But natural forces were carrying out Divine intentions in working the safety of the man who had been faithful to his duty. We have no exact information as to why Nebuchadnezzar was so interested in the prophet's safety, but we may well suppose that he had a sort of respect for a man who served his God so faithfully. The news of fidelity, courage, and endurance goes far, when only one here and there shows the qualities. Moreover, the King of Babylon was very likely to have heard of Jeremiah's predictions; the very knowledge that such predictions existed would nerve him in his attack; and when the attack succeeded, the very fulfilment of the predictions would produce in him a superstitious fear lest the utterer of them should come to any harm. Thus we see how the course of human affairs, without any special intervention, works out good for the brave maintainers of right.

II. Safety in such circumstances. This is of great importance to notice. Jehovah was not concerned to preserve the life of every prophet from a violent end. His prophets, at times, had to trust him even to death, and prophesy even when the prophecy was sure to be followed by a mortal blow. Jeremiah was preserved in safety at this time, not so much for his own sake, as for the effect his preservation would have on the minds of others. His safety was specially provided for *at the time when unrestrained destruction was going on.* Thus his very preservation was itself a prophecy.

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And it is all the more noticeable because Jeremiah himself had, in due course, to make predictions against Babylon. Why some of God's servants live long lives and some short ones is not a fortuitous matter; there is always a reason, could we but see it, and sometimes, as in this instance, there is a glimmer of light upon the reason.

III. THE PROPHET'S DESTINATION. Nebuchadnezzar's order was that he should be treated as he desired. We read that in the end "he dwelt among the people." Hence we may conclude that this was his desire. And where could a prophet better be? Especially if he went among the poor of the people, toiling away in their vineyards and fields, and tried to inspire them with the promises of better times. "Dwelling among the people" is a very suggestive expression when applied to a man like Jeremiah, his office, his character, his experience, being such as they were. The people knew that he lived among them by his own free choice, preferring to share their hardship and poverty. As far as we can see, he might have enjoyed the luxuries of Babylon; but what were these to a man like him?—Y.

Vers. 15—18.—*Ebed-Melech's safety, and the secret of it.* I. EBED-MELECH'S DANGER. He was a court official, and like all others connected with the court, in more danger than if he had been merely one of the multitude. He appears to have been in favour with the king, and all such would be put down by enemies as exciting the king to continued resistance. That is, it would seem to Ebed-Melech so; for why should he suppose that any one should be so specially interested in him as to describe his deeds exactly to the Chaldeans?

II. EBED-MELECH'S SAFETY. 1. *The usefulness of Jeremiah even as a prisoner.* Jeremiah cannot get out among the people, but there is sufficient mitigation of his imprisonment to make him useful to one man. Even in prisons God's servants find opportunities of doing good work for him—so Bunyan writes his 'Pilgrim's Progress.' With peculiar joy Jeremiah must have delivered such a message to one who had been so kind to him. In this, too, we can trace a Divine arrangement. Surely God's delight is to give peculiar joys to such as are diligent in doing his will. 2. *Words of hope are always possible to individuals.* There is no longer any chance for the nation; as a nation it must be scattered and spoiled; but every individual is treated according to his deserts. There is no reason to suppose that Jeremiah and Ebed-Melech were the only individuals to whom God was specially gracious,—it was necessary to mention them; but in all ages there have been many special providences not mentioned.

III. THE SECRET OF EBED-MELECH'S SAFETY. He had put his trust in Jehovah. What does this mean, seeing he is also described as being afraid? We take it that the reference is to his deliverance of the prophet from the dungeon. He really was exercising a faith in God more than he was aware of at the time. In stretching out his hand to rescue the prophet he had got upon the rock of his own safety. In other words, he had shown his faith by his works. A voice from the unseen had spoken and told him to get Jeremiah out of the dungeon, and his consequent action had in it the essence of faith; for he obeyed this voice from the unseen. God sees faith where we, with our prepossessions, would only too often be unable to discern it.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XL.

The first of a series of chapters (xl.—xlv.) describing Jeremiah's fortunes and ministry after the fall of Jerusalem.

Vers. 1—6.—The liberation of Jeremiah.

Ver. 1.—**The word that came to Jeremiah.** The formula seems to announce a prophecy; but no prophecy follows. It is not allowable to suppose, with Keil and others, that "the word" describes the entire body of prophetic utterance in ch. xl.—xlv. (in spite of the fact that ch. xliv. and xlv. have special headings). The use would be unexampled; and a prologue of forty verses (see ch. xlii. 7) is equally contrary to prophetic analogy. Apparently the "word," or prophecy, which originally followed the heading has been lost or removed to some other place. **Had let him go from Ramah.** Here is an apparent discrepancy with the account in ch. xxxix. 14. The brevity of the latter seems to account for it. No doubt the more precise statement in our passage is to be followed. After the capture of the city, a number of captives, including Jeremiah, were probably conducted to Ramah (see on

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ch. xxxi. 15), where they had to wait for the royal decision as to their fate. Jeremiah, however, had already been in custody in the "court of the watch," and the writer of ch. xxix. 14 simply omits the second stage of his captivity (Keil). **In chains.** See ver. 4, "The chains which were upon thine hand."

Ver. 3. **The Lord hath brought it,** etc. The colouring of the speech is that of a Jewish prophet (comp. Isa. xxxvi. 10).

Ver. 5.—**Now while he was not yet,** etc. This rendering, however, seems against the Hebrew usage. Two renderings are open to us. 1. "But since one returneth not from Babylon, then go back to Gedaliah," etc.; so Hitzig. 2. Taking ver. 5 as a continuation of "but if it seemeth ill to thee," etc., "forbear" (in ver. 4), and, supplying, "I have spoken the word," continue, "and it shall not be reversed; yea, go back;" so Graf, regarding the passage as an explanation of the permission to "forbear." **A reward;** rather, *a present.*

Ver. 6.—**To Mizpah.** A place in the tribe of Benjamin, where Samuel judged, and where Saul was elected king (1 Sam. vii. 15, 16; x. 17).

Vers. 7—12.—The Jewish fugitives resort to Gedaliah, who promises them protection as long as they are loyal to Babylon.

Ver. 7.—**In the fields;** rather, *in the field;* i.e. in the open country, as opposed to the towns. **Men, and women, and children.** Old and worn-out men, helpless widows, and fatherless children. Royal princesses were among them (ch. xli. 10).

Ver. 8.—**Jonathan.** This name is omitted in the parallel passage (2 Kings xxv. 23), and by the Septuagint here. It may, of course, be a corruption of Johanan, as Ewald supposes. If so, we must read "son" for "sons," with Septuagint. **The Netophathite.** Netophah was in the neighbourhood of Benjamin. **The son of a Maachathite;** rather, *the Maachathite.* Maachah was a Syrian district in the neighbourhood of Hermon (Deut. iii. 14; Josh. xii. 5). Jezaniah was, therefore, a naturalized foreigner, like Doeg the Edomite (Hitzig).

Ver. 10.—**To serve the Chaldeans;** rather, *to stand before the Chaldeans* (so literally); *i.e.* to mediate between you and them (comp. ch. xv. 1). **Gather ye wine,** etc. It was the fifth or sixth month (comp. ch. xli. 1; 2 Kings xxv. 8), the end of July or the beginning of August, when grapes, figs, and olives become ripe. Observe, "wine" is here the wine in the grape; the Hebrew *yayin* seems originally to have meant a cluster of grapes, like the corresponding word (*vain*) in Arabic (comp. on ch. xlviii. 33). **That ye have taken;** rather, *that ye shall have taken.* (The "captains" had up to this time been in the open country, ver. 7.)

Vers. 13—16.—Gedaliah receives a warning of a plot against his life.

Ver. 14.—**Baalis the king of the Ammonites.** Perhaps the same king referred to in ch. xxvii. 3 as seeking alliance with Zedekiah. He was naturally opposed to the Babylonian official, Gedaliah. **Hath sent Ishmael.** Ishmael was connected with the royal family (ch. xli. 1), and was probably jealous of Gedaliah.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*Jeremiah's release.* I. THE INNOCENT OFTEN SUFFER WITH THE GUILTY. It would seem that orders had been given in Jerusalem for the liberation of the prophet (ch. xxxix. 11—14), but that, in the confusion of the sack of the city, inferior officers had led off Jeremiah in chains with the rest of the captives. Thus he shared the indignities and hardships of companions who deserved a fate from which his innocence should have saved him. It is part of the discipline of life that we should suffer one with another. Amongst men justice is irregular; ignorance and mistakes often result in unintentional cruelty. Men are dealt with in masses, and the individual must suffer with the multitude.

II. JUSTICE WILL BE ULTIMATELY EFFECTED. Jeremiah is discovered at Ramah, and the mistake rectified. This does not always happen so soon. It is sad to think that, even with our enlightened system of justice, there may be innocent men suffering long years of penal servitude in convict establishments, without a chance of clearing their character this side the grave. How much more often must such mistakes occur in more barbarous countries! But it is a consolation for all who are unjustly treated to know that this is but one of the trials of life, overruled to work wholesome discipline, and is but transitory. Ultimately God will visit each man individually with strict fairness and no possibility of error. There were mistakes made in the sack of Jerusalem; there will be none in the judgment of all men at the end of the world. All will be judged, but in the vast crowd of cases there can then be no error, for "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

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III. A RECOGNITION OF THE JUSTICE OF GOD TENDS TO MAKE MEN MORE JUST. The captain of the guard had given sufficient attention to the teaching of Jeremiah to see that the destruction of Jerusalem was predicted by him as a punishment for the sins of the Jews. It may appear hypocritical for one of the soldiers, who had been engaged in the cruel carnage, to reflect piously on the Divine justice of the fate of his victims. But is it not quite possible that the impressive words of an inspired prophet—of which his own are evidently a literal repetition—may have led to his sincere adoption of this view? Alaric seemed to have honestly believed in his mission as a scourge of God. Might not some such idea have taken possession of Nebuchadnezzar and his soldiers, if only as an after-thought? Then it would raise their minds to the sense of the obligations of justice.

IV. LIBERTY IS ONE OF THE FIRST OF EARTHLY BLESSINGS. This is now accorded to Jeremiah. Like health and wealth, it is not appreciated till it is lost. We who enjoy it, however, should remember to be more grateful, and to fulfil our noble mission of carrying it to others who are yet languishing under tyranny or in slavery. One of the first promises of the gospel is the gift of liberty to captives (Isa. lxi. 1). Physical freedom is but the smaller half of the liberty we need. We may have this and yet be slaves. Jeremiah could enjoy it to the full, because he was also possessed of that higher, glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Ver. 6.—*The choice of a residence.* The captain of the guard gave to Jeremiah the choice between an honourable asylum in Babylon and a return to his own land. The prophet selected the latter course. Why did he do so? Although the circumstances of the case were peculiar, the answer to this question may throw light on some of the considerations which should guide men generally in the selection of their places of abode. Several characteristics may be noted in Jeremiah's decision, viz.:—

I. PATRIOTISM. Jeremiah had been accused of a treasonable friendship for Babylon. His conduct in deciding to remain in his native land, wrecked and deserted as it was after the war, in preference to enjoying the position of a privileged guest at Babylon, is an ample refutation of all such charges. Patriotism is more than a sense of duty, it is an affection. It does not speak much for the depth of a man's nature that he can leave his native country without a sigh of regret. If we find it necessary to emigrate, genuine patriotism will certainly incline us to settle in one of the colonies of the British Empire rather than in a foreign country. This point should be insisted on as a duty, not merely treated as a question of sentiment.

II. CONSIDERATION FOR RELIGIOUS ASSOCIATIONS. Babylon was a heathen city. Jeremiah preferred to remain in the Holy Land. Surely the religious advantages of a neighbourhood should be taken into account as of first importance. Yet many people seem to be strangely blind to all such considerations. The soil, the scenery, the society, the convenience of the house, are duly considered; but the Church accommodation is scarcely thought of. A gravel soil is most essential; healthy religious influences are regarded as of very secondary interest. A beautiful view must be got, though the enjoyment of it means banishment from all healthy Church life. How strange that heads of families professing to be Christian should act like pagans in this matter, and care so little for the spiritual atmosphere in which their children are to be brought up!

III. THE SACRIFICE OF PERSONAL CONVENIENCE TO THE GOOD OF OTHERS. Ezekiel could minister to the captives in Babylon. Jeremiah had his work in comforting the remnant in the land of Israel. If he had consulted his own convenience, he might have accepted the offer of a safe and probably honourable position in the land of exile. But he had his work to do at home, and he stayed to do it. Such conduct is a fine example to those of us who, in choosing a place of residence, think of our own pleasure and profit rather than of the good we may do. More especially does this apply to Christian ministers. If the choice lay between easy work in a beautiful place in Devonshire, and the toil of service amid all the squalor and ugliness and wretchedness of a densely populated district in the east end of London, should we be willing to choose the harder but more useful life?

IV. CONTENTMENT AND SIMPLICITY. These are minor characteristics of the choice of Jeremiah, but they are not without their significance. Jeremiah was satisfied to stay in the old land with the poor, after the wealthy and great had been banished. To

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the luxuries of court life at Babylon he preferred the homely ways of the peasants of Israel. In abandoning simplicity for display and excitement, the fashion of our age drives men and women to a life that is neither healthy nor happy. Even if the outward surroundings of a quieter life are not so attractive, its true experience will give a restfulness and a satisfaction that cannot be found in the race of worldly pleasures.

Vers. 7—12.—*The duties of adversity and their reward.* I. THE DUTIES. 1. *Submission.* We are not required to yield before avoidable troubles; but finding some to be irresistible, we are to learn the wisdom and obligation of bending to them without further demur. The captains were no cowards; they had fought and had lost. Their resistance against the inevitable was a mistake; continued resistance after defeat would have been nothing but folly. Submission is much easier when we remember that the trouble is in accordance with the will of a God who is always wise, fair, and merciful. 2. *Industry.* Gedaliah advised the people to set to work at their regular avocations. "But ye, gather ye wine, and summer fruits, and oil, and put them in your vessels," etc. (ver. 10). It is difficult for a dispirited, humiliated, poverty-striken people to settle down to quiet, earnest work. Nevertheless, their duty and their happiness lie in their doing so: (1) their *duty*, for adversity is no excuse for indolence; and (2) their *happiness*, because (*a*) the fruits of their labour would be a beginning of a return to prosperity and wealth, and (*b*) in the very exercise of work they would find a solace and a refreshment. There is nothing so weak or so injurious as an idle brooding over trouble. Be up and doing! And though the work is irksome at first, it will prove itself a great healer of distress.

II. THE REWARD. 1. *A healthy influence over others.* The example of the quiet condition of the remnant of Jews in their native country attracted fugitives to return from the neighbouring countries (ver. 11). Their action was a confirmation of the wisdom of their brethren. A man's behaviour under great trial is keenly observed. If he do well then, he may be the means of influencing others as he can never influence them under ordinary circumstances. Thus he may find consolation for his sorrow in the enlargement of his service to his fellow-men. 2. The *successful issue of industry.* The Jews reaped an unusually abundant grape and fruit harvest (ver. 12). "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." If we complain and despair under distress, we have no right to expect a happy issue out of it. But patient endurance and diligent attention to duty may make us reasonably expect brighter days in the future. Borne with these accompaniments, trouble often reveals itself as less terrible than our fears. When distress comes, we imagine that it has blighted every tree in the orchard and every grape in the vineyard, and so we neglect what consolation we might have in those fruits of patient industry which might still be given to us. Let us remember that during the sad seventy years, and even just after the horrors of the Chaldean invasion, the Jews could gather "wine and summer fruits *very much*."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 18—ch. xli. 4.—*The murder of Gedaliah; or, noble credulity.* No sooner was the new government in a fair way of being settled and prosperous, than untoward circumstances occurred. Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, son of Elishama, a connection of the royal house, inspired, perhaps, with a jealous feeling towards Gedaliah, began to plot with the King of Ammon against him. Under cover of paying his respects to the new governor, he visited him at Mizpah, and partook of his hospitality. Although warned by Johanan the son of Kareah that Ishmael entertained hostile designs against him, Gedaliah refused to credit the information, and indignantly forbade his informant carrying out his proposal to assassinate Ishmael. The latter, finding thus a clear way for his schemes, took advantage of the trustfulness of Gedaliah to accomplish his murderous purpose and to deceive his leading supporters. This done, crime followed upon crime with startling rapidity, until Johanan overtook the miscreant at the "great waters that are in Gibeon," and delivered the prisoners whom he was carrying off. In this tragic incident we see—

I. HOW THE VIRTUE OF ONE POSITION MAY BE THE VICE OF ANOTHER. A trusting,

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ingenuous man like Gedaliah was out of place in more senses than one as governor of such a people. In any circumstances it is necessary that the utmost precaution should be taken with respect to the person of a ruler, as there are always evil-disposed persons who may take advantage of an opportunity, and accidents and misfortunes are continually possible. The off-hand openness, therefore, which is so admirable in the private citizen, upon whose life so little depends, is highly reprehensible in one occupying so responsible a position. When it is remembered that the people over whom Gedaliah ruled were wholly undisciplined, and had but recently been exposed to the most demoralizing influences, his rashness will be even more apparent. It is well when a ruler can combine the trustful ingenuousness of the private citizen with the sagacity and watchfulness his responsibilities impose upon him. Life is full of such misplaced virtues. The poor man open-handed and lavish as when he was wealthy; the rich man meanly careful as when he had everything to acquire, etc.

II. How much is required to justify a wrong action. It was a case, apparently, on Johanan's showing, of self-protection. Ishmael contemplated murder and treachery; what more natural than that he should be killed? Yet this consideration had no weight with Gedaliah. His informant might be mistaken, and was, perhaps, interested. It was foreign to his disposition to be suspicious; and he could not brook the idea of assassination. If the governor was wrong in neglecting the most ordinary precautions, he was certainly right in this. The instinct of the true man is ever averse to underhand actions, even although their object be to avert contingent or certain evils. It is *never* right to do evil that good may come or evil may be averted. The weapons which God's children have to wield are ever those of truth and honour; and these are sufficient if they be sagaciously handled.

III. How great a crime and calamity may be divinely permitted. 1. Jeremiah, for the most part, resided with Gedaliah, and yet no warning appears to have been given him of the catastrophe. How was this? Had it not as profound a bearing on the future of God's people as the march of Nebuchadnezzar's armies? It is a great mystery, and there are many like it. How appalling the wickedness of our Saviour's crucifixion! Yet are the fruits of it a world's salvation. 2. The dictates of common sense and worldly experience, had they been attended to, might have proved sufficient. God's interpositions are not always to wait upon human folly. It is our duty to make the best of the means and information at our disposal. This is especially incumbent with regard to the warnings and instructions of the gospel. The rich man, eager for an evangel from Hades to his careless, sinful brethren, is assured, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke xvi. 31). We may wait long if we expect to be converted by a miracle. The commandment is binding now: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."—M.

Vers. 2, 3.—*The blind seeing, the seeing blind.* This heathen captain, who could not be expected to know the truth, who was, as it were, born blind as to the truth of God, sees clearly that truth, and declares it; whilst the people of Judah and Jerusalem, their kings, their priests, their nobles, all of whom regarded themselves as knowing the truth, who, as in John ix. 41, said, "We see," are found to be completely blind as to that truth. Note herein—

I. How clear was the recognition of God. He ascribes all to "the Lord thy God." He recognizes the prophet as sent of God (ver. 3), "According as he hath said." He traces their calamities to their true cause—sin against God. He recognizes that Babylon and her troops are but ministers of God to do his will.

II. The probable sources of his knowledge. Perhaps: 1. The general belief that each nation had its own deity. 2. Yet more, the prophecies of Jeremiah. 3. Also the strength of Jerusalem. Never, apart from the people's sin, has such a fortress been overthrown. 4. The madness of the people. *Quem deus vult perdere prius dementat.* Only a God-forsaken people could have thrown away their well-being as these had done. 5. The judgments that came upon them.

III. What such facts as these—the blind seeing, etc.—reveal. 1. How clear the light of truth which God has given! Were it not so clear, such as this heathen would not see it. 2. How dense the darkness which persistent sin spreads over the soul!

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Hence the "seeing blind." 3. How awful the doom of those who seeing, see not! Cf. Matt. xi., "Woe unto thee, Chorazin," etc. !—C.

Vers. 4, 5.—"*A strait betwixt two.*" St. Paul tells how he was in such strait. He was willing to stay, but ready to depart home to his eternal rest, which would be far better. And oftentimes we are in perplexities as to choice in the common events and circumstances of our lives. It is so difficult to see what we ought to do, what it would be best to do. Here we have an instance. The patriotic prophet had a perplexing choice put before him. Consider—

I. THE ALTERNATIVES PROPOSED. 1. He *might go to Babylon*, where, no doubt, the same favour that had shown him such consideration thus far would bring him to honour there. 2. He *might stay amongst his own people.* Amid their poverty, their displeasure, their disgrace. 3. Or he *might go anywhere he pleased*—to Tarshish, as Jonah tried, if so he pleased.

II. THE ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST EACH. 1. *For Babylon.* Safety, wealth, honour, help to his countrymen there. 2. *For staying in Israel.* There he had been called; there he was yet needed; Ezekiel and Daniel were in Babylon. Against this, he had no command of God; the peril in which he would be placed.

III. THE DECISION. He resolved to stay. This come to, not because the captain (ver. 5), who saw him lingering, bade him go back, but because the hardness of the duty seemed to declare it was his duty. In such cases *choose what you like least.*—C.

Vers. 7—12.—"*That we may be godly and quietly governed.*" These verses are an illustration of men's desire for such government. In the disorder and confusion of the times, men were looking out for some settled rule. Companies of armed men were camping about, only waiting for some sign to indicate to whose standard they should repair. That which they wanted seemed to be found in Gedaliah. Hence they go to him (ver. 8). The incident here recorded suggests, in regard to government generally—

I. THE COMMON CONSENT OF MEN AS TO ITS NECESSITY. It was not merely one company of the scattered Jews that were on the look out for a leader, but *all* the companies, and not the men only, but their officers also. And in every collection of human beings, however they group themselves, however casually they may have been thrown together, if they have to dwell and to work together the choosing of a leader, one who shall rule them, is a never disregarded need.

II. THE PRINCIPLES ON WHICH THIS CONSENT RESTS. They are such as these: 1. There can be no well-being—strength, peace, happiness—without order. 2. No order without law. 3. No law without a lawgiver, and a law-upholder, *i.e.* a government. It may be monarchical, an oligarchy, a republic, a democracy, only in some way law must be expressed and upheld. Because men feel that this last is necessary to the first, men will ever seek after government, good, if possible, but any is felt to be better than none. Anarchy is so much misery. Thus do men reason in regard to their temporal affairs.

III. THE EXCEPTION WHICH MEN MAKE TO THIS CONSENT. It is strange that there should be exception, but there is. We find it when we look at men's spiritual affairs. Government there is as necessary as in that which is temporal—indeed, far more so, considering the far greater value of the interests at stake. And yet men will not have it. Each seeks to do that which is right in his own eyes. What would be ruin in regard to their secular affairs they deem to be no great harm in things that are spiritual. We see this anarchy at times in *the things of the Church.* If the Church of Christ is to do her work and glorify her Lord, there must be unity, cohesion, subordination, obedience. But these words, and yet more the things they represent, are hateful to not a few. And so the paralysis that has come over large sections of the Church. The prince of this world knows the force and value of the maxim, *Divide et impera*, and he has sought all too successfully to do the one that he may attain to the other. And so in the *individual sphere of the soul.* The one rightful ruler is God, speaking by his vicegerent conscience. All our sin and misery is owing to our disregard of this rule. The world is so mournful a world because it is so sinful a world. Loyal obedience is our life and health and peace. And because we refuse this, we are weak and sad, as well as sinful.

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IV. THE DIVINE METHODS OF BRINGING THIS EXCEPTION TO AN END. For he will bring it to an end, glory be to his Name. He *must* reign till he hath put all things under his feet. And he thus works to this end: 1. *By powerful instructors.* Conscience. His providence, shown now in blessing, now in stern judgment. His Word, in which his law is laid down. 2. By *bringing to bear the most mighty of motives.* Love, which rises at the cross of Christ. Hope of his acceptance and reward. Fear of his awful displeasure and doom. 3. *By his Spirit striving ever with men.*—C.

Ver. 13—ch. xli. 11.—*Misplaced charity.* "Charity," says St. Paul, "thinketh no evil." But without question, there are times when it ought to think evil, and not to think so is evil. For else charity will be misplaced, thrown away, productive of hurt and harm and not of good. Now—

I. THERE HAVE BEEN AND ARE MANY INSTANCES OF SUCH MISPLACED CHARITY. 1. The miserable way by which Gedaliah came by his death, as told in the above section, is an illustration. He ought to have been on his guard. He was warned. He would not believe, but blamed severely the friend who warned him. And all because of his over-confidence in Ishmael, who murdered him. 2. And there have been many other such instances. Perhaps the king who said, concerning the wicked husbandmen, "They will reverence my son." And Paul, who, though warned again and again, would go to Jerusalem. He thought that the loving gifts he bore from the Gentile Churches to the mother Church in Jerusalem would soften their hard hearts. But it was not so. The elder son—though he was quite wrong—thought that his father's treatment of his prodigal younger brother was as unwise as it was kind. We have known those who would never let themselves speak anything but good of others, and the result was that they often misled those who trusted to their over-lenient judgments. How often, after the most atrocious crimes, there will be found some who would try to prevent the criminal receiving the due reward of his deeds! What is it but charity in the wrong place? 3. But most of all are we guilty of this *toward ourselves.* We so little like to think harshly of ourselves, and hence we make all manner of excuse for our faults. We tamper with temptation; we spare ourselves when we ought to be most stern.

II. AND MUCH SORROW AND TROUBLE ARISE THEREFROM. Cf. above history; the massacres that followed; the ruin of the nation. Never did a seeming virtue work such ill. Charity to the evil is cruelty to the good. Choosing Barabbas means crucifying Christ. It discourages all virtue. Wherefore should I strive after excellence if the worthless are to be dealt with even as I? This was the elder son's complaint (Luke xv.). And there seemed to be a good deal in it; hence the father took care to point out to him how much preferable was his own lot: "Son, *thou* art ever with me," etc. Thy lot is ever so much the best, as the lot of him who never leaves the father's house is far better than that of him who comes back after a wretched leaving of it for the far country. But most of all the evil results are seen in our misplaced charity to ourselves. Temptation tampered with triumphs, and we who would not be stern with ourselves perish. Hiding from ourselves the truth as to our real condition, we never go to him who alone can make us what we need to be, and so souls are lost.

III. HOW EXCELLENT THE EXAMPLE AND TEACHING OF OUR LORD ON THIS SUBJECT! Full of charity as he was, tender and gentle as a mother to the weak and sinful, to the poor outcasts who came to him, yet he was never guilty of any spurious charity. He did not, nor does he, warm vipers in his bosom who should sting him at the last. Cf. John ii. at end, "Jesus did not commit himself unto them." "But"—so the Gospel goes on; the word is unfortunately rendered "and" in our Authorized Version—"there was a man of the Pharisees," etc. (John iii. 1). 1. It means that our Lord did commit himself to this man—as we see he did—since he was very different from those whom our Lord could not and would not trust. His treatment of Judas was no exception to his rule. He *knew* him from the beginning. Nor is his treatment of ourselves, poor, sad recompense as we make him. He has taken us in hand, and he will not put us out of his hand until he has wrought in us all that he designs. He exemplified his own word about being, whilst harmless as doves, wise as serpents also. He says (Matt. vii. 1), "Judge not." But almost the next verse bids us *not* cast pearls before swine! The intent is that, whilst we should not be censorious, we are not to be blind fools, who

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will imagine in their false charity that pearls will be appreciated by pigs. Charity *is* to think evil when evil is palpably there.

IV. WHAT LEADS TO THIS ERROR. Cf. the history. 1. Perhaps Gedaliah's conscious integrity; his freedom from all intent of evil. 2. Or over-elation at the loyalty and trust that were being displayed on all sides. 3. The accused man had himself (ver. 8) come to Gedaliah. 4. Or dislike to Johanan and his proposals. 5. Or reliance on his own capacity of taking all due care. And when we are wrongly charitable to what is evil, our motives are akin to these. We intend no evil; that which is said to be evil has wrought no harm in others. We intend to be on our guard, and deem ourselves to be quite able to take care of ourselves. We dislike the safeguards proposed. We do not believe in the peril against which we are warned. We are disposed to think well of and to like the evil.

V. OUR SAFEGUARDS. 1. Seek the knowledge of man. 2. Seek the Spirit of Christ.—C.

Vers. 2—6.—*Jeremiah a free agent.* We have here an expansion of vers. 13 and 14 of the previous chapter.

I. ONE OF THE BEST THINGS A MAN CAN HAVE IS FULL INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY. The royal master of the captain of the guard was anxious to do the best he could for the prophet; and he seems to have understood fully that only the prophet could decide on this best. The captain of the guard, in all he says, is but the mouthpiece of the king. Very likely the captain, if he had been left to decide, would have said, "What better thing can happen to this man than go to Babylon with me?" and so, meaning well enough, he might have done ill. Good intentions are not enough in providing for others. We go rather by our notion of what they want than by what they really want; and thus we are disappointed in our efforts. There never can be anything wrong in giving a man the largest scope to settle his path for himself. We may easily become cramped as a result of the ignorant kindness of others.

II. THERE WAS AN INCREASED RESPONSIBILITY FOR JEREMIAH. For a long time he had been in prison, and all he had to do was to endure captivity in a patient, trustful way. But now comes liberty, and in his case a peculiar responsibility. Few men, perhaps not even a single one, had the liberty enjoyed by him at this moment. Others had not been asked whether they would go to Babylon or stay. The conquerors settled all that. But Jeremiah has free choice, and he has to decide in very altered conditions of the land. Freedom brings human judgment into full strength and exercise.

III. JEREMIAH WAS SURE TO DECIDE RIGHTLY. Why? Because the first thing he would look to was the will of Jehovah. What lesson had he been learning all through his prophetic life but this, that negligence of the will of Jehovah brought incalculable mischief? Here is the necessity for us to keep in a state of discernment with respect to the will of God. As a general rule, we do not need special intimations of the Divine will; right is seen to be right and wrong to be wrong. But there are also times when, as we need such special intimations, they are sure to be given.—Y.

Vers. 7—12.—*The difficulties of a governor.* To govern a country is never an easy task; but how difficult it must be when the work is that of reconstruction! Gedaliah has to begin, as it were, at the beginning. One of his first difficulties is to know exactly what he has to deal with. There are turbulent as well as peaceful elements, bands of free-lances, who, now that the Chaldean has gone, make their appearance before the governor to see what the prospect may be. Another difficulty is that of inspiring confidence. Those who have just been plundered may be excused for apprehensions lest they should soon be plundered again. On the other hand, Gedaliah was better off than the king who had just been dethroned. The latter vainly held on to a tottering building, whose very foundations were going, while the former was free from the pernicious elements which so long had made all government in the land an abomination. With all his difficulties, Gedaliah had some encouragements. There appears to have been a general gathering to him as a centre. Most men generally tend to the point where there are the greatest prospects of social order, security, and stability.—Y.

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Ver. 16.—*Trusting a traitor.* I. IN SPITE OF CAUTIONS. Gedaliah was told that Ishmael meditated his death. Told, not by one man, but by all who had opportunity of knowing the traitor's designs. Was it, then, blameworthy in him to neglect the information? We cannot tell. It may have been that he knew of jealousies which made him think that the rest of the captains were slandering Ishmael. Slanderers, be it remembered, are quite as numerous as traitors. The fault of Gedaliah, if fault it was, was that of a generous heart. It is one of the weapons of a traitor to put on the semblance of a true man. Then probably Gedaliah was further influenced by the proposition to kill Ishmael. If the informers had merely urged him to guard himself, they might have been better attended to. But those were days when, if people wanted to get rid of a troublesome man, they had little scruple in taking the most effectual way.

II. AN INSTANCE OF RASH JUDGMENT. Gedaliah in one breath judged the traitor to be a true man and the speaker of truth to be a slanderer. In this world of uncertainties there is no need to refuse any accusation. Only let the accusation be accompanied with evidence. Trumped-up evidence soon shows its faults and contradictions. If Gedaliah had bid Ishmael meet the accusation, he might have prevented the serious migration spoken of at the end of the next chapter. He had to take care of himself not only for his own sake, but as the representative of Babylon.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XLI.

Vers. 1—10.—Assassination of Gedaliah and other Jews.

Ver. 1.—**In the seventh month**; *i.e.* two months after the destruction of Jerusalem and the appointment of Gedaliah. It seems strange, however, that the occurrences related in ch. xl. and xli. should have taken so short a time. Grätz calls in question the accuracy of the chronological statement. He quotes Ezek. xxxiii. 24—29, which shows that at least six months (according to his calculation) after the fall of Jerusalem Jewish fugitives still lingered on, and hoped to obtain possession of their fatherland, and points out that time was necessary for Gedaliah to erect a temple at Mizpah (see on ver. 5), for cities to arise out of their ruins, and for cultivation of the soil to be resumed (ch. xl. 10).[1] Besides, according to ch. lii. 30, a third deportation of Jews is mentioned. How can this be accounted for, if, only two months after the fall of Jerusalem, the remnant of the Jewish population emigrated under Johanan ben Kareah to Egypt? Grätz shows reason for thinking that this last deportation stands in close connection with Gedaliah's death, and that consequently the interval between this latter event and the fall of Jerusalem lasted, not two months, but five years. **The son of Elishama.** Perhaps the Elishama mentioned in ch. xxxvi. 12 as a secretary of state; or perhaps a son of David of that name (see 2 Sam. v. 16; 1 Chron. iii. 8; xiv. 7; "son" being taken here in a wider sense). **And the princes of the king**; rather, *and (one of) the princes of the king.* **Even ten men**; rather, *and ten men.* Eleven determined bravoes overpower a crowd of unprepared men. **Did eat bread together.** Gedaliah, then, had invited them to a friendly banquet.

Ver. 2.—**Smote Gedaliah.** The day of the murder of Gedaliah (the third day of the seventh month) was kept as a fast-day by the post-Captivity Jews (see Zech. vii. 5; viii. 19). It was the day on which the hope of living a separate life in the promised land, for a time at least, vanished; and the murder was avenged by a new captivity (see above).

Ver. 3.—**The Chaldeans.** Gedaliah's Chaldean body-guard. And **the men of war**; rather, *even the men of war.* Jewish as well as Chaldean warriors are meant; the non-military Jews, including the prophet, were carried away captive (see vers. 10, 16).

Vers. 4—7.—The news of the deed of violence had not yet been spread, and Ishmael seized the opportunity of imbruing his hands in fresh blood. He could have had no personal motive; but his employer, Baalis, desired that "the remnant in Judah might perish" (ch. xl. 15).

Ver. 5.—**There came certain from Shechem,** etc. A number of pious pilgrims, descendants of the old ten tribes, passed by on their way to the holy site of the temple at Jerusalem (?) (comp. 2 Chron. xxxiv. 9; xxx. 11). **From Shiloh.** The Vatican Codex of the Septuagint has a plausible reading, "from Salem," which is apparently sup-

[1] 'Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums,' 1870, pp. 268—275.

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ported by Gen. xxxiii. 18, "And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem," and by its improvement thus introduced into the geographical order (Shiloh is, in fact, nearer to Mizpah than Shechem, and ought to be mentioned first). But though there is now a village called Sâlim, to the east of Nablûs (Shechem), we have no sufficient ground for assuming a city of that name in the Old Testament. The rendering of Genesis, *l.c.* needs correction ("came in peace to the city," etc.) **Their beards shaven,** etc. They had, then, all the outward signs of mourning (for the public calamities); comp. ch. xvi. 6; xlviii. 37. **To bring them to the house of the Lord.** Yet the temple at Jerusalem was destroyed. Hence Thenius and Grätz have conjectured that Gedaliah had erected a provisional temple at Mizpah, which was already hallowed by its association with the Prophet Samuel. This is confirmed by 1 Macc. iii. 46, where it is said of the pious Jews in the Maccabean rising, that they "assembled themselves . . . and came to Maspha, over against Jerusalem; for in Maspha was the place where they prayed aforetime in Israel."

Ver. 6.—**Weeping all along as he went.** To testify his sympathy with their grief. But the reading of the Septuagint is more natural, "As they were going along and weeping."

Ver. 7.—**The pit** (see on ver. 9).

Ver. 8.—**Slay us not,** etc. Bishop Callaway refers to this passage in his 'Zulu Nursery Tales' (i. 242), in illustration of a Zulu form of deprecating death on the ground of having some important work in hand which absolutely requires the life of the person in danger. But the "ten men" do not, as the bishop supposes, beg their lives on the ground that they had not yet harvested, but rather offer a bribe. **We have treasures** (literally, *hidden things*) **in the field.** The allusion is to the "wells or cisterns for grain," in which "the farmers store their crops of all kinds after the grain is threshed and winnowed. These cisterns are cool, perfectly dry, and tight. The top is hermetically sealed with plaster, and covered with a deep bed of earth; and thus they keep out rats, mice, and even ants, the latter by no means a contemptible enemy. . . . These ten men had doubtless thus hid their treasures to avoid being plundered in that time of utter lawlessness" (Thomson, 'The Land and the Book,' p. 509). **Honey.** Probably that obtained from wild bees.

Ver. 9.—**Now the pit . . . which Asa the king had made,** etc. Nothing is said of this "pit" in the historical books, but only (1 Kings xv. 22 = 2 Chron. xvi. 6) that Asa used the material with which Baasha had fortified Ramah to build Geba and Mizpah. It would seem that this "pit" formed part of Asa's defensive works; probably it was a cistern to supply the town with water during the siege. **Because of Gedaliah,** was it. The rendering "because of" must be abandoned. The Septuagint has, in this part of the verse, the very natural words, "was a great pit," and this reading is adopted by Movers, Hitzig, and Graf.

Ver. 10.—**The king's daughters;** rather, *the royal princesses* (see on ch. xxxvi. 26).

Vers. 11—18.—Rescue of the captives from Ishmael, and plan for taking flight to Egypt.

Ver. 12.—**The great waters . . . in Gibeon;** *i.e.* the pool mentioned in 2 Sam. ii. 13. Dr. Thomson (p. 670) speaks of a "pond or small lake" near El-Jîb. Ishmael seems to be lingering over his journey to Ammon, in order to find the subterranean stores spoken of in ver. 8.

Ver. 14.—**Cast about;** *i.e.* turned about (an archaism).

Ver. 17.—**And dwelt in the habitation of Chimham.** Chimham was the son of the rich Gileadite Barzillai (2 Sam. xix. 37—40), who probably founded this "habitation," or rather "hospice" ("khan," "caravanserai"), for the accommodation of travellers—a characteristic mark of public-spirited liberality. Josephus and Aquila, however, appear to have read "by the hurdles of Chimham"—a very possible name for a locality in such a pastoral country.

Ver. 18.—**Because of the Chaldeans.** They were afraid of being held responsible for the crime of Ishmael. And they had good reason for their alarm, as the Chaldeans would naturally look upon Ishmael as the representative of the Davidic dynasty, and the heir of that dynasty's claims to the loyalty of the Jews.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*The assassination of Gedaliah.* I. HIGH POSITION BRINGS GREAT DANGER. Kings are little to be envied. The world sees their state and majesty. It does not see the apprehensions which would make some of them willingly exchange places with the humblest peasant. Nevertheless, it is as cowardly and selfish to refuse to occupy a high position when duty calls to it as it is to fail in fulfilling one's mission in any of the lower walks of life.

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II. A GOOD MAN WILL PREFER TO SUFFER DEATH RATHER THAN TO DEFEND HIMSELF BY UNRIGHTEOUS MEANS. Gedaliah had been warned of his danger, but he had refused to accept the warning (ch. xl. 13—16). It is better for one's character, if not for one's earthly fate, to be over-generous than to be over-suspicious. Though we may think Gedaliah wanting in discernment, we must commend his justice in refusing to consent to the assassination of Ishmael. When we are in doubt about the guilt of any one, it is our plain duty to give him the benefit of that doubt. In no case have we a right to defend ourselves against a future wrong by anticipating the blow with an act of unlawful violence.

III. POLITICAL CRIMES ARE THE GREATEST CRIMES. Much vagueness exists as to the character of these crimes. If the assassin is successful, the world condones his offence, while, if he fails, his memory is execrated and he is condemned as a murderer. Many political acts are viewed as crimes by one party and as heroic deeds by another. But the moral character of a deed is not determined by such accidents as these. If it be really a crime, an offence against the eternal laws of right, its relation to public and national affairs aggravates its wickedness, inasmuch as it immensely enlarges the arena of its mischievous results (ver. 3).

IV. PUBLIC INTEREST IS NO EXCUSE FOR POLITICAL CRIMES. Ishmael might have contended that he was a patriot helping his people to throw off the yoke of Babylon. If he were acting that noble part, his method of carrying it out would still have been odious and unpardonable. Patriotism is no excuse for private treachery. Moreover, public interest is never truly advanced by crime. Ishmael's crime resulted in serious trouble to the Jews. It destroyed the hope of a quiet life in the land of Israel for the returned fugitives and the poor remnant of the nation. It probably led to a third deportation of exiles to Babylon.

Vers. 4—8.—*The slaughter of the pilgrims.* I. A NEEDLESS CRIME. Of course no crime is necessary, but some crimes have their plausible excuses. This had none. Ishmael had tasted blood, and murderous passions urge him to wanton violence. His only object in slaughtering quiet, inoffensive pilgrims must have been to please his master by the further depopulation of the land. So great a crime with so poor a motive evidences bloodthirsty tyranny. The worst crime is crime held cheap till it is pursued for no reason. All wickedness makes future wickedness more tempting. Done at first for some ulterior object, it becomes at length a passion and a delight in itself. This is the very devilry of crime.

II. A TREACHEROUS CRIME. Ishmael led the pilgrims to trust themselves in his hands, and then abused the sacred relations of hospitality. Such an act shows as much meanness as villainy. But all wickedness is essentially false, degrading, treacherous.

III. A SACRILEGIOUS CRIME. These men were pilgrims of religion, bearing incense in their hands. To us it may seem no more wicked to murder a pilgrim than to murder an innocent man. In itself the acts are equally wicked. But guilt depends on the criminal's idea of his crime, as well as on the inherent character of the act. Now, wherever sacred places are venerated and visited by pilgrims, the pilgrimage is regarded as a sacred work, a religious service. To slay a pilgrim is, therefore, held as a distinct insult to the service of God. This must have been the way in which Ishmael's act would have been regarded, and he must have known it. Therefore, judging him by the ideas and manners of the time, as it is only fair to judge him, we must acknowledge that he was guilty of a wilful affront against the religion of his nation. In all sin we sin against Heaven as well as against man. In some offences the offence to Heaven is more palpable than in others. Then the sin is the more horrible in its guilt on the conscience of the criminal.

IV. A COLD-BLOODED CRIME. The thing was done deliberately. The richer pilgrims were allowed to buy their lives for a ransom. The ten men who had treasure in the field purchased their escape (ver. 8). The rest, poorer men, were slain. Such a transaction reveals the cool calculator as well as the hardened murderer. The passionate man is responsible for the evil done in his rage, because he ought to restrain himself; but the calmer man, who can and does restrain himself in certain respects with regard to his own interest, is far more guilty for the wickedness he commits in clear self-possession.

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HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—10.—*Devils incarnate.* 1. If ever there was such a one, this Ishmael was of whom these verses tell. His atrocities remind us of the Indian Mutiny, its leader, and the well at Cawnpore (cf. ver. 9). Treachery, ingratitude, murder, massacre, greed, cowardice,—all are gathered in this detestable character (cf. Mr. Grove's article "Ishmael," Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible'). 2. And such men are permitted to be. So clearly seen is this, that every drama has its villain; they are recognized as having definite place and function in this poor life of ours. History is full of them. But for them one might almost say there would be no history. 3. Can we explain this permission? Wherefore are such men created and preserved? It is a part of the great question of moral evil, for the full solution of which we must wait. Like as was said to a lad of one of our public schools, who had heard his master say in a sermon in the school chapel that in mathematics there were lines in the same plane ever converging but which never met. The lad heard this, and as he knew something of mathematics himself, he believed and said to a senior in the school that the master was wrong. The senior defended the master, and told the lad of the lines that mathematicians call asymptotes. "But explain," said the astonished lad. "No, I can't," said the other. "*You must wait till you get there.*" The lad had not read on so far in the science as that, and hence there was nothing for it but to believe that, though it was at present incomprehensible to him how such lines as those spoken of could be, nevertheless, when he had read on further, he would see it clearly enough. And so we have to hear and see things which, to fully reconcile with the existence and superintendence of an all-loving and all-powerful God, is beyond our power, and there is nothing for it but that we must "wait till we get there"—there where the reading of these problems will be ready and clear. But the existence of such men as this Ishmael is but one out of the many terrible facts in God's providence, such as plague, famine, earthquake, etc. In regard to such men, we can see some purposes that they subserve.

I. They make evident the hideous capacities of evil which are in our nature, and the need, therefore, for God's restraining grace.

II. They are warnings to increased watchfulness on the part of those in whom the tendencies to like evil exist.

III. They are God's scourges for men's sin (cf. Attila, the Scourge of God).

IV. They weld together the people they oppress in one common league against them, and thus out of scattered tribes a nation is formed.

V. They clear out much that is evil (cf. French Revolution; Napoleon). But sometimes, as here, we cannot see what good they do; and then we can only wait.

CONCLUSION. But we can get above these and all such afflictors of our lives. The fear of God will lift us up above their power.

> "Fear him, ye saints, and you will then
> Have nothing else to fear."

On the wings of the fear and love of God let us mount up; and like as the little birds escape the hawk by keeping above it, so shall we escape all fear of fiercest human evils if we are upborne by the fear and love of God.—C.

Ver. 8.—*Sin hindered by sin.* "So he forbare," etc. This was a case of bloodthirsty cruelty *versus* greed. Ishmael would have killed these men but for his greed of the wealth they had. It is satisfactory to think he never gained possession of it. Nevertheless, his greed made him guilty of one sin less. This story suggests that—

I. GOD HAS MANY WAYS OF HINDERING SIN. There is: 1. The best way of all. By granting a true repentance and his Holy Spirit, creating the clean heart and renewing the right spirit. 2. But there are other ways. By keeping the opportunity and the will apart. How much of our freedom from sin do we owe to this blessed providential severance! By fear of present evil consequences of our sin. 3. And sometimes, as here, by one sin getting in the way of another. Thus *pride* holds back not a few; not love of God, gratitude to Christ, love of holiness, but pride. And *coveteousness* checks the sinner in many sins he would be guilty of but for this. *Anger*, breaking up the

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alliances of transgressors; as when, in the days of Jehoshaphat, the Ammonites who were coming against him fell out one with the other (2 Chron. xx. 22). The old saying is, "When thieves fall out, honest men come by their rights." *Sensual self-indulgence.* The vilest Roman emperors were those who least persecuted the Church—Tiberius, Commodus, etc. They were too absorbed in their own indulgences to trouble about the Christians.

II. BUT THESE OTHER WAYS LEAVE MEN AS GREAT SINNERS AS BEFORE. The question is not as to your freedom from transgression so much, but—What kept you free? Only the first and best way is accepted of God.

III. NEVERTHELESS, LET US BE THANKFUL THAT SIN IS SELF-DESTRUCTIVE IN ITS VERY NATURE. It is a blessed anarchy, for it protects many who would otherwise suffer.

IV. BUT FOR OURSELVES LET US SEEK THAT SIN MAY BE DESTROYED BY CHRIST.—C.

Vers. 11—15.—*The devil a bad paymaster.* These verses record the pursuit and overthrow of Ishmael. He had sold himself to work all manner of wickedness. What had he not been guilty of? And now we hear the last of him. He is seen in flight to Ammon, whence he came out, escaping with his life, but stripped of all his captives and his plunder. He had taken a world of trouble, incurred a load of guilt, filled his soul with evil, dishonoured his name for ever. And this was what came of it all. Every one of his purposes, plans, hopes, all his toil and villainy, all his apparent success, utterly lost and gone. He is one out of many more proofs of the miserable wages of sin. Now—

I. IT IS EVER SO. Men may go on in sin for a long time, and be undisturbed save by conscience; may find their sin very pleasant and very gainful, and they may seem to escape with utter impunity; but the visitation of God comes upon them, sometimes here in this life, certainly, if not here, hereafter. The Bible history, the world, are full of proofs of this.

II. BUT MEN CANNOT BE GOT TO BELIEVE THIS. Else why do they persist in evil ways?

III. WHY IS IT THAT THEY WILL NOT BELIEVE? They do not wish to believe. Sentence against evil work is not executed speedily, sometimes not at all here in this world in any visible way.

IV. WHY, THEN, DOES NOT GOD DEAL DIFFERENTLY WITH SIN? Because his purpose is to foster trust and love, neither of which could find place in a system of prompt and visible punishments such as some would desire.

V. DOES GOD, THEN, DO NOTHING TO CHECK THE SINNER AND TO ENCOURAGE THE OBEDIENT? Yes; much. 1. He causes the way of transgressors to be hard. Loss of peace, of hope, of Divine favour, of purity, of strength, of sympathy with and from the good, often of present and visible good; conscience is deadened, and the soul perishes. Besides this, there are frequent direct judgments sent. 2. On the other hand, he orders that in keeping of his commandments there is great reward. "His ways are ways of pleasantness, and all his paths are peace." It is related how an aged couple in the vicinity of London, who in the early part of life were poor, but who by the blessing of God upon their industry enjoyed a comfortable independency in their old age, were called upon by a Christian minister, who solicited their contributions to a charity. The old lady was disposed to make out some excuse, and to answer in the negative, both for her husband and for herself, and therefore replied, "Why, sir, we have lost a deal by religion since we began; my husband knows that very well." And being wishful to obtain her husband's consent to the assertion, she said, "Have we not, Thomas?" Thomas, after a long and solemn pause, replied, "Yes, Mary, we *have* lost a deal by our religion! I have lost a deal by my religion. Before I got religion, Mary, I had got a water-pail in which I carried water; and *that*, you know, I lost many years ago. And then I had an old slouched hat, a patched old coat, and mended shoes and stockings; but I have lost them also long ago. And, Mary, you know that, poor as I was, I had a habit of getting drunk and quarrelling with you; and that, you know, I have lost. And then I had a burdened conscience and a wicked heart, and then I had ten thousand guilty feelings and fears; but all are lost, completely lost, and like a millstone cast into the deep sea. Before we got religion, Mary, you had a washing-tray, in which you washed for hire, and God Almighty blessed your industry; but since we got religion you have lost your washing-tray. And you had a gown and

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bonnet much the worse for wear, though they were all you had to wear; but you have lost them long ago. And you had many an aching heart concerning me at times; but those you happily have lost. And I could even wish that you had lost as much as I have lost, and even more; for what we lose by our religion will be our eternal gain." We need not add that the preacher did not go away without substantial proof of the sincerity of what had been said in his hearing. And to all those who like the rich man in the parable (Luke xvi.), who asked that one from the dead might be sent to warn his five brethren, the same answer may be given, "They have Moses and the prophets," and we may add, in our day, far more than these; "if they hear not them, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."—C.

Ver. 17.—*Too near the edge.* This is one of the reflections that come to us as we read of the place whither Johanan led his followers, and as we see the events that happened immediately after. This chapter is a record of disappointments. First the hopeful prospects of Gedaliah's governorship, which seemed starting so fairly and happily for all, these are shattered and overthrown by the villainous conduct of Ishmael. Then it is a grievous disappointment that we do not hear of Ishmael's death, only of his escape. That such a wretch should escape with his life seems a reflection upon that justice which generally follows on the track of wrong-doers such as he was, and metes out to them their due. Escape seems too lenient a dealing with him. And now here is another disappointment that Johanan, instead of seeking to follow in Gedaliah's footsteps, should be for leading the people down into Egypt. "At the caravanserai of Chimham, in Bethlehem—the natural halting-place on the way to Egypt—Johanan held a council of war, and then, against the prophet's advice, finally determined to abandon their homes, and to make for the refuge, to which the worldly Israelite always had recourse, across the Egyptian border." It was a bad place to halt at; it was too near that beguiling land, the witchery of which not a few of them had long been feeling and would now feel more than ever. Whenever Israel went thither, it was always a "going *down* into Egypt." This was more true morally and spiritually than even geographically, to which the word "down," of course, refers. And the present was no exception. Looking at them there at Chimham, we note—

I. THE RESEMBLANCE THEY OFFER. Are they not like all those who *tamper with temptation?* They know, as Israel knew, that they are in a forbidden path, and yet they do not keep clear of it. Like moths fluttering around the flame, so men will dally with sin. They know that to yield would be both most wrong and ruinous, and yet they go close to the border.

II. THE REASONS WHICH GOVERNED THEM. The Jews came to Chimham because their will had already consented to go further—on and down into Egypt. For like reasons men come to such places. There has been already the secret yielding of the will. There was no need of the Jews being at Chimham. It was not the way back from Gibeon. It was a deliberate going into temptation. So those who act like them have, as they, already consented in heart. And the causes of that consent are akin. They falsely feared what the Chaldeans might do, though there was no ground for such fear; and they falsely hoped for good—freedom from war and want—which they never realized. And such persons will ever magnify both the difficulties of the right path and the looked-for pleasures and advantages of the wrong. Thus would they persuade themselves that the right is wrong and the wrong is right.

III. THE RESISTANCE THEY SEEMED TO MAKE. The Jews did not yield all at once. They appeal to the prophet. They ask his prayers. They make repeated and loud —much too loud: "Methinks he doth protest too much"—professions. They wait patiently the prophet's message. And yet all the while (ver. 20) they were dissembling in their hearts, "regarding iniquity" there (cf. history of Balaam). They would have God on their side, not themselves on God's side. All this is most melancholy matter of fact with those who, of their own accord, go too near the edge.

IV. THE RESULTS THAT FOLLOWED. Of course they went over the edge; such people always do. They showed the insincerity of their prayers by their anger when they were denied (cf. ch. xliii. 2, etc.). They escaped none of the evil they dreaded; they gained none of the good they expected. "So disastrous did this step appear to the next and to all subsequent generations of Israel, that the day of Gedaliah's murder, which led to

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it, has been from that time forth and to this day observed as a national fast. It seemed to be the final revocation of the advantages of the Exodus. By this breach in their local-continuity a chasm was made in the history, which for good or evil was never filled up." Yes; they who will go so near temptation will go into it, and be borne down by it to their sore hurt and harm.

V. THE REMEDY RECOMMENDED. Jeremiah urged them to return to their own land and stay there (ch. xlii. 8, etc.), promising them the blessing of God if they obeyed, and threatening his sore anger if they did not. This counsel ever wise. Get away from the border-land back into safety. Think of what will follow on your conduct—the blessing or the curse. "Stay not in all the plain, but escape for thy life." As "the angels hastened Lot," so would we hasten all those who have foolishly and wrongly chosen to go too near temptation's edge.—C.

Vers. 1—18.—*A great crime and its consequence.* I. A GREAT CRIME. The slaying of Gedaliah was accompanied by circumstances making it peculiarly atrocious. 1. *The breach of good fellowship.* There had been professions of amity before. Gedaliah shows by deed his confidence in Ishmael, sitting down with him at a common meal. 2. *The subsequent slaughter.* The slaying of Gedaliah was not enough to serve the purpose. A man, once entered on the ways of crime, cannot say, "So far I will go, and no further." Ishmael had to go on killing to secure his own safety and mastery.

II. THE CONSEQUENCE. The chief consequence was the departure to a point nearer to Egypt, to escape if possible the vengeance of the Chaldeans. One man sins and other people suffer. The great lesson is to stop crime in its beginnings. Ishmael gained none of the ends he seems to have had in view, and was this much the worse, that he had deep stains of murder on him.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XLII.

Jeremiah receives a request to inquire of God concerning the proposed emigration, and a "word of the Lord" follows.

Ver. 1.—**Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah.** For "Jezaniah," the Septuagint has "Azariah," the name given in the Hebrew text of ch. xliii. 2.

Ver. 2.—**Said unto Jeremiah the prophet.** Jeremiah, we have been already told, was one of the refugees at Mizpah (ch. xl. 6), and consequently was forced into the train of Ishmael (ch. xli. 16). **Pray for us.** This petition has been accused of hypocrisy, but the prophecy of Jeremiah assumes throughout that it was made in earnest (ver. 20 proves nothing to the contrary). The "captains" never supposed it possible that Jeremiah could direct them to stay in Judah; the only question with them was as to the best direction for flight.

Ver. 5.—**A true and faithful witness between us;** rather, *against us.* If they broke their promise, Jehovah was to "witness against" them by punishing them.

Ver. 7.—**After ten days.** Why this delay? Keil thinks it was for the sake of the people, who needed time to collect themselves and listen calmly to the revelation. Ezekiel once waited seven days (iii. 16); but this was owing to his own disturbed state of mind. The answer of the Lord extends to ver. 18, the last four verses being an epilogue enforcing the Divine declaration. It consists of the promise (vers. 9—12) that, if the people will remain quietly in the land, they will be protected; and of the threat (vers. 13—18) that, if they presume to migrate into Egypt, they will perish there by sword, famine, and pestilence.

Ver. 10.—**Build you, and not pull you down,** etc. Some of Jeremiah's favourite phrases (see on ch. xxiv. 6). **I repent me.** And yet in 1 Sam. xv. 29 we read that "Israel's Trust . . . is not a man that he should repent." The key to the discrepancy may be found in Ps. xviii. 25, 26, "With the pious thou showest thyself pious, . . and with the froward thou showest thyself froward." There is no change in the nature or purpose of God, but only in his conduct towards man. The term "repent" is, therefore, only used analogically.

Ver. 12.—**I will show mercies unto you;** rather, *I will procure you mercy.* **And cause you to return to.** As if the journey to Bethlehem were a virtual Exodus. But it is far more natural to read the consonants of the text in a slightly different manner, rendering, "and cause you to dwell in." So the Syriac, the Vulgate, and Aquila.

Ver. 15.—**And now therefore.** Omit "and;" the *vau* simply marks the apodosis of the two previous verses.

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Ver. 16.—The sword, which ye feared; rather, *which ye fear.* The calamities mentioned were precisely those of which the Jews were apprehensive in their own country. So afterwards, "whereof ye are afraid." **Shall overtake you there.** For a further explanation, see ch. xliii. 8—13.

Ver. 20.—For ye dissembled in your hearts; rather, *for ye have gone astray (from the right path) at the risk of your lives;* or, another possible rendering, *for ye have led yourselves astray.* Hypocrisy is certainly not the accusation which Jeremiah brings against the people.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—6.—*Taking counsel with God.* I. TROUBLE DRIVES MEN TO PRAYER. In their trouble "all the people, from the least even unto the greatest," sought help from God through the prayers of Jeremiah. In deep distress there are common wants of humanity, which touch alike the prince and the peasant. Then one common cry will burst from all lips to the God of all flesh. The beggar and the king in their agony utter the same moan, "My God!" There was but "a remnant" of the Jews left in the land. All these united to seek counsel of God. United prayer is prevailing prayer. If we are few, the more reason we should be united, and the more reason that each of us should come forward and do his part. If a congregation is small, it can the less afford that any one member should be prayerless or idle.

II. IN PERPLEXITY WE SHOULD SEEK LIGHT FROM GOD. His Spirit is a Spirit of light. We have a right to expect guidance because we have Divine assurances of this (Ps. xxxii. 8). God will guide us, however, through our own thinking, and not by audible voices, nor should we look for the direction in mystic inward impressions, the origin and character of which we cannot test. God has given us eyes, and he expects us to use them. His guidance is the purging of our vision, that we may see the better with our own organs of sight; the rectifying and strengthening of our intelligence and conscience, that we may use these as right instruments for discerning truth.

III. CHRISTIAN MEN SHOULD PRAY FOR OTHERS. Every Christian has now the privilege of being a prophet (Joel ii. 28) and a priest (Rev. i. 6). Every Christian, therefore, has the responsibility which accompanies his privilege, and is required to act as the intercessor for others. Are we not too selfish in our prayers? Nevertheless it must be remembered that men gain little good from the prayers of others unless they will also pray for themselves. The worst man is not left dependent on the intercession of good men. Through Christ he may approach the heavenly throne with his own cry for mercy.

IV. IT IS THE DUTY OF THOSE WHO ARE CONSULTED TO GIVE PAINFUL AS WELL AS PLEASANT ADVICE. Jeremiah warned the people that he would "keep nothing back." The seeming kindliness that restrains the utterance of unpleasant but important home-truths is really only a cloak for selfishness. The preacher must not shun to declare the whole counsel of God—the hard sayings of Scripture, the unpopular doctrines of Christianity, the unflattering truths of human nature.

V. IF WE TAKE COUNSEL WITH GOD, WE MUST CONSENT TO OBEY HIM. Otherwise our prayer is a mockery; for God is not an Oracle, but an Authority. What he reveals is not merely hidden mystery, but obligations of duty. He guides us to his will. It is our place to follow the guidance and do what is thus not only declared, but commanded.

Ver. 3.—*Divine guidance.* I. THE NEED OF DIVINE GUIDANCE. **1.** It arises out of our *obligation to do the will of God.* We are not left to carve out a career for ourselves, but to fulfil a Divine vocation. With this definite end before us, our life must fail unless we are directly making for it. A harmless life, following its own whims and fancies, is a wasted life. But only God knows his own will. Therefore we need that he shall reveal this to us, to show us, not only the path of safety, but the way he wills us to go. The most clear-sighted need this guidance. As servants, we wait for our Master's orders; as soldiers, we are to follow our Captain's commands. Without these, how can we do the one thing needful? **2.** It arises out of our own *ignorance and blindness.* We do not know all the circumstances which surround us; we cannot predict the exigencies of the future; the ultimate issue of our actions is beyond our

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reckoning; the limits of our powers are not known to us; our future requirements and capacities cannot now be gauged. Yet we must decide and act at once in relation to all these unknown quantities. Therefore only a higher wisdom and a larger knowledge can secure us from fatal blunders.

II. THE METHOD OF DIVINE GUIDANCE. The Jews appealed to a prophet. We have no Jeremiah. Yet we have essentially the same means of guidance, now broken into two parts, for the higher education of our spiritual nature. 1. *The revelation of God's will and truth in Scripture.* There we have God's guidance in the words of the prophets, and in addition to that in the higher thought of the apostles of the New Testament and of Christianity. Above all, we have the great example, the speaking lessons, of the life and character of Christ, who is the "Light of the World." In all this we have larger, clearer views of God's will and of man's duty than were given to the Jews under the earlier dispensation. 2. *The light of the Spirit of God in our mind and conscience.* It may be urged that, while the instructions of the prophets for the guidance of Israel were definite and particular, the lessons which we may gather from revelation are general; and that, though the ideas of conduct thus communicated to us are higher and larger than those of the Jewish economy, they are nevertheless so abstract that we may make great mistakes in the practical application of them. This is true; and therefore, with the less particular revelation, God gives to us more light for the interpretation of it. We live under that dispensation of the Spirit wherein all Christians are, in a measure, prophets, and God's Spirit is poured out upon all flesh (Acts ii. 17). By God's light in our souls, interpreting God's revelation in Christ, we may know God's will concerning our lives; and, no longer slaves to the letter of unintelligible precepts, we may carry out the broad principles of the spiritual life by a thoughtful and conscientious application of them to the details of daily life.

III. THE USE OF DIVINE GUIDANCE. God reveals the way; we must walk therein. The direction may be so clear that he who reads may run, yet he must run. The sign-post is not a carriage to convey the indolent traveller to his journey's end. God reveals his will; he leaves it to our free choice and effort to obey it. He does not guide us, like the horse or mule, with bit and bridle. We are not forced to follow the revelation, but we are bound in moral obligation to do so. The main object of the revelation of truth is to guide us in practice. God enlightens our darkness that we may gird up our loins and walk in his ways.

Vers. 5, 6.—*Implicit obedience.* The people swear to obey the voice of God before they know what injunctions it will lay upon them. They contemplate the possibility of receiving unpleasant commands; but they leave the decision in the hands of God, undertaking to follow it, whatever form it may take. Thus they bind themselves to implicit obedience. Let us consider the obligation and the limitation of implicit obedience.

I. THE OBLIGATION OF IMPLICIT OBEDIENCE. This requires us to obey the voice of God when it calls us to do anything within the range of right and possibility; *i.e.* anything which a wise and good God would ever command. It implies a possible conflict with our inclination, our opinion, or our worldly interest. Otherwise the obedience becomes a mere form. If we only obey when we like to do the thing required, we are not really obeying a higher will, but simply following out our own will in accidental coincidence with the will above us. True obedience only begins when it leads us to do what our own wisdom or desire would not have prompted. It must, therefore, be prepared to run counter to these private tendencies. It must be the submission of our will and opinion to God's will and wisdom. Now, not only is this implicit obedience obligatory, but it is a certain fact that God will put it to the test. His higher will and larger wisdom must often conflict with our foolishness and self-will. Moreover, amid the trials of life, God will certainly sometimes require us to do what seems evil to us, *i.e.* what is painful and contrary to our wish. Therefore faith is essential to obedience. In so far as we can trust God, we shall be able to obey his darker counsels.

II. THE LIMITATION OF IMPLICIT OBEDIENCE. The highest obligation is to do right. If, therefore, we could be required by a supreme being to do what we knew was wrong, it would be our plain duty to disobey his will. The being who laid such a mandate upon us could not be God. He would be an almighty demon. Were such a monster

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to exist, it would be the duty of all creatures to resist him, though they became martyrs for their fidelity to righteousness. Our obligation to obey God rests on the fact that he is supremely good, and not merely on his infinite power and greatness. Let us suppose that we received a seemingly Divine mandate requiring what we felt to be wrong —what should we do? Three courses would then be open to us. We might believe that it emanated from a supreme being who was wicked, and should therefore be disobeyed; we might conclude that we were mistaken in supposing it to come from a supreme being—that we were suffering from a hallucination; or we might feel convinced that it was sent by the holy God, and that we were wrong in our impression of its unrighteous character. To Christians who believe in a perfectly good God, only the two latter alternatives could present themselves. But here the choice lies between the inward and the outward voice. If, then, the inward voice is clear and unmistakable, we are bound to give the preference to this. The outward voice claims to come from God; but so does the inward voice. If the two conflict, we must choose between them, and then we should feel that it is more likely we are suffering from a delusion in our external perceptions than that what we firmly believe in our conscience to be wrong is yet right. Loyalty to God will lead us to obey God's voice in the conscience above all things. At all events, so long as we believe—though even erroneously—that a thing is wrong to us, it is wrong, and no prophet's or angel's words should lead us to perform it without first convincing us that it is right.

Ver. 7.—*The answer to prayer delayed.* I. THE FACT. Ten days elapsed before Jeremiah was able to give an answer to the people. When Christ was asked to give his aid at the wedding feast where the wine ran short, he refused to do anything immediately (John ii. 4); and when summoned to the sick-bed of Lazarus, "he abode at that time two days in the place where he was" (John xi. 6). We must, therefore, expect that a similar delay may sometimes attend the answer of our prayers. Perhaps the interval will be much longer. We have cast our bread upon the waters, and it will not appear till after many days. We should learn, therefore, that prayer does not fail because the response is not immediate. Whatever be the delay, we may be sure that to a true prayer in Christ's Name the right answer will come at the right time. God is not dilatory. He will never wait beyond the very best season for acting.

II. THE CAUSE. Much of this is mysterious, and we must learn to accept the mysteries of Providence with faith in the unfailing love of God. But some grounds for the delay of God's answers to our prayers may be discerned and should be considered to check our impatience. 1. There is a *season* for everything. God will watch for the fitting opportunity, and send his blessing when it will be most profitable. 2. The fitness of God's answer to prayer depends on *our condition.* There are things which would injure us as we are. God waits to be gracious, waits till we are in a fit state to receive his grace. 3. Some things given as the answer to prayer *require time for development.* At the beginning of Daniel's prayer the angel was sent, but some time elapsed before the prophet received his message (Dan. ix. 23). God may set in train the actions which are in answer to our prayer immediately the prayer is made, and we may only be waiting for that result which could not come quicker. 4. Meanwhile God *tests our faith* by delaying the answer to our prayer. The time is not lost. It is profitably spent in the trial and culture of our own souls. So it is with the greatest blessing of the heavenly reward and with many lesser good things; God withholds them for a time that we may learn to walk by faith.

Vers. 9—12.—*The blessedness of patient endurance.* In answer to the appeal of the people for guidance, Jeremiah has to tell them that good will attend them so long as they stay in their land, but curses if they flee to Egypt. Hardships crowd upon them at present, and dangers threaten for the future. But if they will but endure these patiently, God will save and prosper them.

I. WHY THE PEOPLE WERE REQUIRED TO REMAIN IN THEIR LAND. 1. It was the *will of God.* When we know his will, if we know nothing more, that alone should be a final answer to all questions. Because he is our King we are bound to obey, and because he is our Father his will must be for our good. 2. It was the *course of faith.* Flight to Egypt was always regarded as a sign of distrust in God and reliance upon the arm of

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flesh. Repeatedly had the people been warned not to trust "upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh King of Egypt unto all that trust on him" (2 Kings xviii. 21). When Pharaoh takes the place of Jehovah, when any earthly judge is trusted rather than God, it will surely betray us. 3. It was a *safeguard for purity*. Egypt was a heathen power. An asylum in Egypt would bring temptations to immorality and unfaithfulness to the God of Israel. It is always unwise and wrong to run into temptation in order to escape from trouble. 4. It was a *sign of contentment*. It is happiest for a man to do his duty in that state of life into which it has pleased God to call him, though if God calls him out of one state to a more prosperous one, he may enjoy the greater comfort thus gained.

II. WHAT PROMISES WERE GIVEN TO THOSE WHO REMAINED IN THEIR LAND. 1. *Prosperity would be restored.* The troubles of God's people are transitory. Patient endurance will see the end of all of them. Then God will bring, not bare deliverance, but happiness and prosperity. The Jew looked for this in temporal concerns; the Christian expects it in eternal things. 2. *The people would be delivered from danger.* God would save them from the King of Babylon. And if this salvation was possible, shall we not believe that all other deliverances are possible, and rest calmly assured that to those who patiently and obediently submit to God no real harm can come? Nebuchadnezzar may triumph insolently; but God can cast him down to the level of the brutes. The lions may roar, but they are chained, or God will send an angel to shut their mouths.

III. WHAT ASSURANCES THE PEOPLE HAD THAT IT WOULD BE THUS WELL WITH THEM IF THEY REMAINED IN THEIR LAND. 1. They were assured of the *presence of God.* "I am with you" (ver. 11). If God is with us, we can dispense with the patronage of a Pharaoh, even though a Nebuchadnezzar is thundering at our gates. 2. They were assured of the *active help of God.* "I am with you—to save you." The very object of God's presence is his people's good. When present he does not only observe; he acts, saves, delivers. 3. They were assured of the *continued mercy of God.* "I will procure you mercy" (ver. 12). 4. They were assured that *God would overrule their enemy and convert him into their friend.* Nebuchadnezzar should be made to have mercy upon the people. Thus what we most fear is led by God to work our good when we are obedient and submissive.

Ver. 19.—*Contradictory requirements.* The Jews were here required not to flee into Egypt. Joseph was warned by an angel in a dream to "arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt" (Matt. ii. 13). The Scriptures represent both commands as coming from God. Yet they are contradictory. This is but one instance of a discrepancy often to be met with. Let us consider the meaning of it.

I. DIVINE REQUIREMENTS MAY BE OUTWARDLY CONTRADICTORY AND YET CONSISTENT IN PRINCIPLE. In general principle what is right once is right eternally; what is right for one man is right for all men; what is right in one place is right everywhere. The moral laws of God are eternal, immutable, universal. They are as true in Sirius as on the earth, to angels and to demons as to men. But the application of these principles necessarily varies. 1. *The same act has a different character, under different circumstances.* Egypt was an imposing heathen power in the days of Jeremiah; it was but a Roman province in the time of our Lord. Flight to Egypt at the earlier time meant distrust in God and reliance on the arm of flesh; no such alternatives accompanied the decision of Joseph. Thus it often happens that consistency to principle will permit and require great variations of conduct according to the changing necessities and dangers of life. 2. *The same act may have a different character with different persons.* Identical general moral obligations apply to all of us equally. But men have different duties in the carrying out of those principles, according to their constitutional differences of capacity and disposition. One man can stand on the verge of a precipice without a tremor, another turns giddy as he approaches it. For the one to be there is harmless, but it is most dangerous for the other. The first man may do what is no risk to him, but the second will be foolish and wrong if he follow his example. So there are scenes which afford temptation to some temperaments and none to others. The duty to avoid them must vary with this variation of danger. 3. *The*

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same act may have a different character according as it is performed with a different motive. Flight may denote cowardice or prudent caution. Passive endurance may be determined by weakness and indolence, or it may result from submissive trustfulness.

II. THE OUTWARD CONTRADICTION OF DIVINE REQUIREMENTS WARNS US TO ESTIMATE ACTIONS SOLELY BY THEIR INNER CHARACTER. 1. We should be *careful not to condemn others* because their behaviour strikes us as superficially opposed to what is right from our own point of view. Their circumstances, character, and motives may be quite different from what we suspect. The man who is condemned as a miser may be wisely thrifty. He who is regarded as a meddlesome busybody may be conscientiously discharging what to him is a public duty. The seeming devotee of pleasure may be generously laying himself out to brighten the sad world with ministries of happiness to others. The apparently ambitious despot may be an enthusiast for the regeneration of humanity. 2. We must beware of the *slavish imitation* of the best examples. What was wise and right in them may be positively wrong in us. Even our imitation of Christ must be spiritual rather than external. Surely in calling us to follow him, he does not require us, like St. Francis, to become homeless wanderers, because the Son of man had not where to lay his head. Because he drove out the desecrators of the temple with violence, it may not be right for us to use similar violence, when what was done by him from pure zeal might only be followed by us with angry passions.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—6.—*Inquiring of God in great crises.* I. THE RIGHT AND DUTY OF IT. 1. *Because of his claim to respect and obedience.* It was a traditional custom in Israel. Jehovah was their national God. He had delivered them, created them into a nation, and laid them under eternal obligations. (1) There is a general obligation upon all so to do. Even those who do not recognize any special relation existing between God and themselves have reason for drawing nigh to him. There are moments when the things of life assert their sacredness and awful mystery, when God besets them behind and before. His providence is a continual appeal. And the sense of sin, of helplessness, and of indefinite hope leads them to his footstool. (2) It is specially incumbent upon those who are related to him through grace. Judah represented ancient Israel, and, although now but a remnant, was still privileged with the presence of a true prophet of God. Christians should be eager and ready to call upon him, as they have the promises reaffirmed in Christ, and the witness of his Spirit in their hearts that they shall not ask in vain. Their whole position is due to his grace, and it is but right that this should be acknowledged. 2. *Because of helplessness and danger.* The petitioners were "left but a few of many." They knew that it was through their own folly for the most part that they had been brought to such a pass. We know that in the great crises of life we are unable to guide ourselves. The future is dark and full of trouble. 3. *Because of God's wisdom, power, and love.* He knows all things, and is able to deliver from all evil; and he has assured us of his willingness to guide and protect. The larger, grander policy of life is only possible with his inspiration.

II. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH IT SHOULD BE ENTERED UPON. 1. *Humility.* In external attitude and language they left little to criticize (ver. 2). Consciousness of our own need and weakness. 2. *Confidence.* We must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of all them that diligently seek him. Their requesting Jeremiah to pray to the Lord his God, and their expression of willingness to do as he should advise, showed a measure of faith. 3. *Obedience.* This they professed (ver. 6). 4. *Sincerity.* (Ver. 6.)

III. THE DANGERS TO WHICH IT IS EXPOSED. Notwithstanding all their profession, we can detect: 1. *Signs of systematic neglect of God and religious ordinances.* The expression "came near" suggests a previous habitual distance from Jehovah. They appear more anxious to conciliate the prophet than him whom he served. There is no confession of sin. Probably Jeremiah had been all but ignored up to that time. What a strange phrase, "the Lord *thy* God"! The prophet seeks gently to lead them to a better standing—"the Lord *your* God;" which they seem to adopt. "*To whom we send thee*" still betrays the absence of filial love and intimacy. Their subsequent behaviour showed that: 2. *They were unreal and hypocritical in their whole attitude.*

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They had made up their mind as to what was best for them to do, as the resort to the "habitation of Chimham" already proved. With one foot in Canaan, as it were, and another out of it, they pretended to inquire of God. This is a very common practice, but it is one which not only robs prayer of its meaning and efficacy, but also brings upon the head of those who are guilty of it a grievous curse, as in this instance. A portion of their prayer *was* answered, but in a way they little expected: "The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us."—M.

Vers. 19—22.—*Carnal predispositions.* I. THEY ARE THE GREAT SOURCES OF UNREALITY IN RELIGION. In sending Jeremiah to God they did not mean what they said. There was no honest willingness to do as the prophet might reveal. The only hope for them in their forlorn condition is thus tampered with and destroyed. It is possible that at first they may have meant well, but as they proceeded with their inquiry through the prophet they must have known that they had only one intention, which they had not laid aside or even held in abeyance. Yet such is the subtlety of the hypocritical heart that it continues in its hypocrisy until it deceives itself. "They inquire not to learn what is right, but only to receive encouragement to do what they wish."

II. THOSE WHO INDULGE THEM ARE THEIR OWN WORST ENEMIES. 1. *They deceive and injure themselves.* "Ye dissembled in your hearts" (ver. 20); literally, *deceived yourselves*; "used deceit against your souls" (margin). Thinking they were taking counsel of God, they were really obeying their fears and lusts. Can a greater wrong be done to one's self than this—to think one's self religious and obedient to the heavenly will when one is only selfish and sinful? Safety and happiness lay in following simply the Divine guidance; but this they could not do, for they knew not God's message when it came. "Thinking themselves wise, they became fools." Their spiritual nature is henceforth unreliable, and their greatest perils will be encountered in their most religious hours, and when they think themselves most in agreement with God's will. 2. *The curse of God is denounced against them.* What they choose will be their destruction. The very things they sought to avoid by going to Egypt are met there. And there is no mitigation; the position is one wholly wrong, and consequently the wrath of God is unceasing until they cease to occupy it. To remain in Egypt, with its idolatries and abominations, was virtually to annul the covenant. Soon every trace of true religion would disappear, and they would become like their neighbours, and be absorbed into the nations in whom God had no pleasure. He cannot tolerate falsehood, protension, the form of godliness without the reality. And this severity is true mercy. Many a one "plucked as a brand from the burning" has had reason to thank his Saviour that "the way of transgressors is hard." "Let a man examine himself." "Be not deceived: God is not mocked."—M.

Ver. 1—ch. xliii. 7.—*Dissembling in prayer.* This section may teach us much on this very serious matter.

I. WHAT IT IS TO DISSEMBLE IN PRAYER. It is: 1. *To pray in a deliberately continued unregeneracy of heart.* The hearts of not a few of those Jews who now sought Jeremiah's prayers were deliberately held in a condition of disobedience. They had never really repented. How many such pray, but their prayer is a dissembling! 2. *When allowing ourselves in forbidden paths.* The Jews had no business on that border-land. It was a yielding to temptation to go there. So when we come from sin to the throne of grace, and go thence to sin again, this is, etc. 3. *When we are not setting ourselves to mortify our evil affections.* The Jews here showed no real, sincere intention to give up their own will and to obey God's. They would not have been on that border-land had such been the case. And so where there is no real striving against sin, this is, etc. 4. *When whilst we pray we regard iniquity in our heart.* That is to purpose and intend it; or to look upon it complacently and desiringly. The Jews, whilst praying to know God's will, were all the while looking with strong desire after what they knew was wrong. Like as when Balaam offered his many sacrifices, his heart was all the while going after its covetousness.

II. WHAT CAN LEAD MEN TO BE GUILTY OF SUCH DISSEMBLING? We should imagine they never could be; that the thing would be too outrageous, wicked, and absurd for

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any one to be guilty of. And yet there have been and are many such prayers. They may be partly explained by: 1. *The force of habit.* The locomotive, if left to itself, will run along the rails for considerable time and distance, slowing and stopping only very gradually, though the steam has been shut off the whole while. So those who have been wont to offer prayers will keep up the form and habit, though the heart be wanting. 2. *They may be themselves deceived.* Their strong desire for God's sanction might lead them to imagine they would gain it by their prayers. 3. *They would not break with God altogether*, and they deem that they can keep up their communications by such methods as these.

III. How prayers are proved to have been of this evil character. 1. *By anger at their refusal.* See how angry these Jews were. The state of mind with which we come away from our prayers will show much the true nature of those prayers. 2. *When we make them only through others.* The Jews left it to Jeremiah. So now men leave to their ministers or friends the prayers they profess to value. 3. *When they are followed by open and defiant disobedience.* So was it here (ch. xliii. 1—7). Nothing could more plainly have shown how hollow and insincere were their prayers. And so now, when men pray, and rise up and go and do worse than before, what can their prayers have been?

IV. What are the results of such prayers? They grieve the Spirit of God. They harden the heart, and tend to make men of a reprobate mind. Cf. our Lord's words to the Pharisees—the pattern dissemblers of his day. They pave the way to "the damnation of hell." Therefore—thus let us conclude—be our prayer, "Search me, O God, and try my heart," etc.—C.

Vers. 7—18.—*Man's utter dependence upon God.* These verses plainly show this much-forgotten but never-failing truth. They tell how the land of Judah, desolate, unprotected, and oppressed, could be and should be made a happy land for them. Whilst Egypt, the land they hoped so much from, should bring on them all the sorrows which they thought by going there to escape. Thus we are taught that it is according to God's favour our lives are blessed or unblessed, bright or dark. Mere circumstances are unable to ensure either the one or the other, but the presence or absence of God's favour alone. Now—

I. Men do not think this. See their frantic endeavours to make their circumstances pleasant. And how they struggle against adversity, as if all evil were contained in that! Their opinion is very clear.

II. But yet it must be. For: 1. Our happiness or unhappiness depends entirely *on the way in which we regard these circumstances.* That is to say, it depends upon our mind, upon that which is within us rather than that which is without. Hence what gives great pleasure to one yields none or even the reverse of pleasure to others. The merry laugh of children, *e.g.*, to one in deep sadness, or irritable, or discontented. And *vice versâ*. But: 2. *God has constant access to the minds of us all*, and he has made their satisfaction to depend upon him. "Nostrum cor inquietum est donec requiescat in te" (Augustine). He can flood them with joy in the darkest hour—Paul and Silas in the dungeon at Philippi; and he can make the most favourable circumtances powerless to render a man happy—Haman because of Mordecai; the conscience-stricken, those from whom for any cause he hides his face, are illustrations. And abundant facts prove the powerlessness of mere circumstance over the minds of men.

III. The influence that these considerations ought to have upon us. 1. *Not to lead us to despise circumstances*, and so to be careless as to the outward lot of either ourselves or others. For though they have not all power over the mind, God has given them very much power—a power that they lose only when he pleases. 2. But *to estimate them rightly.* This we can only do as we bring into view the unseen and the eternal, which can only be as we live in view of it by the habit of prayer, thought, and practical regard to God's will as expressed in conscience and his Word. So shall our balances be adjusted, and we shall rightly judge. There is a machine employed at the Mint of such perfect accuracy and finish that, when a number of sovereigns are tested by it, it will automatically and instantly and infallibly reject every one that fails in the least degree to come up to the proper standard of weight. So if we thus bring into view the unseen and eternal, all the crowd of facts and events that come

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before us day by day will each one spontaneously, promptly, and infallibly be judged, and we shall neither under nor over estimate them but as we ought. 3. To seek above all things the favour of God; for "in his favour is life, and his loving-kindness is better than life itself."—C.

Vers. 1—6.—*Waiting on the Divine ordinance.* I. THE REQUEST OF THE PEOPLE. 1. *The apparent unanimity of it.* All the people come, from the least to the greatest. Certainly there were not very many of them. They were but a remnant to begin with, and now still further reduced. But such as they were, an outward unity obtained among them. Outward unity is often obtained with comparative ease, but it must not be forgotten that it may cloak indifference, discord, opposition, and may be followed by contradictory conduct, even on the part of those who make the largest professions of submission. 2. *The profession of submission to Jehovah.* The request described a real want, whether the people meant all they said or not. And there is no reason to suppose that they did not mean it at the present time of asking. Men ask sincerely enough for Divine guidance, not being able to see at the time how hard it will be to follow it up. They want to be shown a way in which to walk, and then, when the way is shown, it looks too hard and perplexed to be God's way. They want to be shown the thing to do, and, when it is shown, there appears to be no use in it, no obvious relation of means to ends. Here is a result of prophetic teaching. The people had learnt from many prophetic utterances what they ought to ask for. 3. *Their dependence on the prophet.* Here is man showing his need of mediation. The people had come to know at last that Jeremiah was the faithful and accepted servant of God. This is the best way of recognizing a good man—to ask him to help those in need. And they wished also to commend their desires to the prophet. They wished him to pray a prayer that should be his as well as theirs.

II. THE PROPHET'S ANSWER. That he complies with the request is little to say. The prayer was one he could pray with all his heart. Well would it have been if he had been asked to offer it years before. That which taxed him was to tell them that he would faithfully report the answer. For he knew that God's message would go deep into the necessities of the case; that God's answer could not be comprehended by the limits of man's desires. This is the temptation of messengers, to keep something back through fear, or expediency, or mistaken kindness. Now, Jeremiah was well assured from a long experience that Jehovah never said a word too many or too few. The genuine promptings of the Spirit of God are the very best guide as to what we should tell men in the hour of their need.

III. THE PROMISE OF THE PEOPLE. They seem to hint that they are ready for difficult and painful requirements. History is not lost upon them so far as their professions are concerned. They hint how they have learnt that disobedience to God brings the worst of evils. One thing, however, they had not yet learnt, and that was the difference between knowledge and power. When men are in great straits they will make large promises in the hope of deliverance; not at all insincerely, but meaning all they say. It was with the people here as it is with people in dangerous illnesses—the way of restored health is to be the way of obedience and piety. That people make such promises shows that the promises are right; the wrong thing is that they lack in strength, persistency, and inward purpose to keep them. God has to make this lack plain before men will humble themselves to have it supplied.—Y.

Vers. 7—12.—*Divine comforts for those in doubt and fear.* I. THE MEANING OF THE INTERVAL. There are ten days to wait between the prayer of Jeremiah and the answer of Jehovah. Why this waiting? It must have been in some way for the sake of the people. They had said very emphatically they would be obedient; would they be obedient to begin with, to the extent of waiting ten days for God's answer? It had also to be seen whether they would continue in the spirit of obedience at all; and would they *all* continue in the same spirit?

II. EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON THE DISPOSITION OF THE PEOPLE. God will do great things for them if only they do not destroy the effect of his actions by their self-will and instability. They were to show their trust in God by abiding in the land. Nothing could be done without this. God uses, to indicate his work for them, two words

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which imply fixity—building and planting. Let *us* also recollect the greatness of God's power to them that believe. If we take no trouble to furnish the occasion, we must not complain.

III. THE GREAT WORK GOD IS DISPOSED TO DO. It is indicated by these two not infrequent figures of buildin gand planting. God was willing to make these people his husbandry, his building (1 Cor. iii. 9). He had been lately engaged in a great pulling down and rooting up; and why? Because his people had been putting up the wrong buildings, planting the wrong plant. Every plant not planted by God must be rooted up. God is the Builder, not a mere helper in building. We may be said to be fellow-workers with God, but it can never describe him rightly to call him fellow-worker with us. The work and the glory are his of building up the holy character, the perfect manhood, the everlasting home. He it is who makes his people fruitful in every good word and work. And the way for all this building and planting was now clear so far as God himself was concerned. All the pulling down and rooting up was done. Only let the people give the needed opportunity and all else would prosper.

IV. CAUTION AGAINST NEEDLESS FEAR. The temptation here, as so often, was to fear man too much and God too little or even none at all. "The fear of man bringeth a snare." The people feared the King of Babylon, forgetting the limits of his power and the way in which he was controlled by Jehovah.—Y.

Vers. 13—18.—*A land to be avoided.* How solemn and urgent this warning! Let us ask why it was needed, why God seemed thus to cast doubt on the power of the people to obey him.

I. THE PERILOUS LAND WAS NEAR. They were right in the way to Egypt, having, indeed, moved Egyptwards rather than in any other direction (ch. xli. 17).

II. IT HAD OBVIOUS ATTRACTIONS. 1. *It seemed to be a land of peace.* Egypt had been looked to as a friend and ally. The desolation of Jerusalem had come from the north. When people have been going through a time of war and siege, peace is naturally the blessing put in front of their thoughts. And is not this a good thing, it may be asked? Yes, surely, if peace be desired on high grounds, and from a horror of discord among men. But men may seek it simply to escape from disturbance and from loss of life and property. Their seeking of peace may be a sign of cowardice and altogether grovelling aims. Danger may be escaped by the outer man, only to be concentrated more effectually on the man within. 2. *It would be a land of bread.* Another recommendation of a land which it was unquestionably right for men to attend to. Egypt was one of the great granaries of the ancient world. But it did not therefore follow that it was a land to live in. Israelites, in particular, needed to recollect how their fathers, beginning by going to Egypt for bread, ended by sinking into most oppressive bondage. Besides, even the land of bread was at times a land of famine. 3. *It consequently looked a land to dwell in.* God is the God of his people only when they are in their proper place. He was God of the exiles in Babylon, because their going into Babylon was of his operation. But those who went to Egypt in search of mere immunity from toil and inglorious ease could not expect to have the Divine favour. They wanted to get the great ends of life without discipline, sacrifice, and endurance.

III. THE VAIN PURPOSE TO ESCAPE FROM EVIL. God tries to make the people understand that they take the germs and principles of evil with them. What we find in any place depends on what we bring; and what we bring we must, in process of time, inevitably find. What had there been to hinder the land of Israel from being a land of peace and a land of bread? Nothing but the faithlessness and general wickedness of the people. We cannot sow wickedness in one place, and then hope to go and reap only good things in some other place. God can turn any place, however fruitful, into a wilderness; and, on the other hand, we know how Jesus made a wilderness a place to feed five thousand men. Jehovah spoke with all this severity to these people to make them understand how hard a thing real obedience was.—Y.

Vers. 19—22.—*Searching the heart.* There is here a very sudden and striking turn away from the tone of the previous part of the message. God looks into the future, and, seeing what actually will happen, seeing that Egypt will maintain its attraction,

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he warns the people they are going towards a certain doom. Their present state was one of undue, overweening self-confidence; and God will not allow people to remain under deception as to their own weakness, if a startling and abrupt message will serve to arouse them from it. Perhaps we shall not be far wrong in assuming that the changing tone of the prophecy is occasioned by the changing mood of the audience. While the prophet is speaking of the dangers of Egypt, their deep desire after Egypt is half revealed. The one gate into which they wished to enter is peremptorily closed against them. All at once there may have been a sort of awakening to the fact that God knew their hearts better than they did themselves. We must recollect, too, that Jeremiah spoke out of no short or imperfect experience. He saw that the people were disappointed; that, instead of a word pointing them towards Egypt, there was sentence upon sentence warning them against it. How hard it is to be sure of knowing the will of God! How easy to mistake for it the impulses of indulgent human prudence! God tells the people plainly they are going to seek for things they will never find. Instead of living in peace, they are to die by the sword. Instead of getting abundance of bread, they are to die by famine and by the pestilence that accompanies lack of bread. Here altogether is an example of the need of that prayer in Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XLIII.

The flight to Egypt; Jeremiah's prediction of Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Egypt.

Ver. 2.—**All the proud men.** It would seem as if the "proud men" were distinguished from others. Jeremiah had called the whole people together (ch. xlii. 8); but a few domineering men assumed to represent the rest.

Ver. 3.—**Baruch the son of Neriah setteth thee on.** A singular supposition—Jeremiah leaving the initiative to his secretary! It may be conjectured that Baruch had somehow made himself specially unpopular; he may have been a more practical man (comp. ch. xlv. 5) than Jeremiah.

Ver. 5.—**All the remnant of Judah, that were returned from all nations.** The specification is peculiar, as it seems to leave out of sight the most important part of the gathering at Mizpah, viz. the "men, and women, and children, and those of the poor of the land" (ch. xl. 7)—the very persons who are mentioned just afterwards. Possibly there is some confusion in the text. "All nations" doubtless means especially Moab, Ammon, and Edom.

Ver. 7.—**Tahpanhes.** An Egyptian frontier city (see Ezek. xxx. 18 and note on ch. ii. 16), where the fugitives had to wait till the views of the Egyptian government respecting them were made known. The supposed site of the Pelusiac Daphnæ has not yet been explored; a single inscribed fragment would reveal the Egyptian name, and probably ratify the identity of Daphnæ with the Tahpanhes of the prophets (R. S. Poole, 'The Cities of Egypt,' p. 177).

Ver. 9.—**Take great stones, etc.** A strange symbolic act of Jeremiah's is here described. "We must not suppose, arguing from our Western and precise notions, that he would be at all necessarily interfered with. In fact, he would have a twofold security, as a prophet of God to those who acknowledged him as such, and in the opinion of others as insane, and, according to Eastern ideas, thus especially under Divine promptings in his acts" (Streane). He is directed to take great stones and embed them in the mortar (not "clay") in the brick pavement at the entry of the palace. When the events predicted came to pass, these stones would testify that Jeremiah had predicted them. The word rendered "brick pavement" is of doubtful meaning. In Nah. iii. 14 it signifies "brick-kiln."

Ver. 10.—**And will set his throne,** etc.; viz. for the victorious king to hold judgment (comp. ch. i. 15, 16; xlix. 38). **He shall spread his royal pavilion**; rather, *his tapestry* (the root means "brilliance"); *i.e.* the bright-coloured covering of the throne.

Ver. 11.—**He shall smite the land of Egypt.** On the invasion of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar, wrongly controverted by some, see note on ch. xlvi. 13. **Such as are for death.** Such as are destined for death (*i.e.* pestilence, as ch. xv. 2; xviii. 21). The words, "and deliver," prefixed in the Authorized Version, are unnecessary; "land" is equivalent to "population."

Ver. 12.—**Burn them**; viz. the temples. Egypt was full of gorgeous and imposing temples, which could not, however, always be burned, nor were the conquerors of Egypt anxious to display hostility to Egyptian religion. **Carry them away captives**; viz. the idol-gods (comp. ch. xlviii. 7, "Chemosh

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shall go forth into captivity;" and Isa. xlvi. 2, "Their soul [or, 'personality'] hath gone into captivity"). The prophet speaks from the point of view of a believer in the idol-gods. **He shall array himself with the land of Egypt**, etc. (For "array himself with" and "putteth on," read *wrap himself in* and *wrappeth himself in*.) Ewald well explains this figure. "As easily as the shepherd in the open field wraps himself in the cool night in his mantle, will he be able to grasp Egypt with his hand and fling it round him like an easily managed garment, in order then to leave the land as an absolute conqueror, clothed in this attire of booty, in peace, without an enemy."

Ver. 13.—**The images of Beth-shemesh**; rather, *the pillars of Beth-shemesh*; i.e. the obelisks of the temple of Ra, the sun-god, from which Heliopolis derived its sacred name "Pe-Ra" "the abode of Ra." It was the custom to place obelisks in pairs at the entrance of their temples. Only one of those of Heliopolis is still standing, though that, indeed, is the oldest in Egypt, for it was "set up at least four thousand years ago" (R. S. Poole, 'The Cities of Egypt,' p. 131). **That is in the land of Egypt.** To distinguish it from the Beth-shemesh in Palestine. But we may also render "which are," etc.; comp. "the gods of Egypt" in the second verse-half. The Septuagint reads, "which are in On."

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 2.—*Moral causes of unbelief.* The causes of unbelief may be either intellectual or moral. It is not just to assume that they are of the latter character. There is an honest doubt, and many a brave soul has been forced to fight its way over a wild desert of difficulties before seeing the light of Divine revelation. Nevertheless, it is necessary for our own warning and in controversy with others to remember that there are moral causes for unbelief, and that in some cases these may be much more operative than any purely intellectual consideration. Azariah and his friends have discovered no good ground for doubting the Divine authority of Jeremiah's message. They have seen nothing to detract from the claims of the prophet and nothing to contradict what he says. Yet they reject his message and charge him with falsehood. The palpable explanation of their conduct may serve to explain the ground of much unbelief in our own day. In the main this consists in two things.

I. THE UNPOPULARITY OF THE DOCTRINE. Jeremiah had run counter to the determination of the leaders of the people. Instead of modifying their conduct in obedience to the Divine message, they preferred to reject the message and deny its authority. This was most irrational. Yet it is a sample of the commonest conduct. People test their creed by their will instead of their reason and conscience and its own evidences. They say they do not *like* certain ideas, as though truth were a matter of taste. But truth is the statement of facts, and facts are not altered by sentiments. In the present instance the question was as to God's will. Was it not possible from the first that this might contradict the opinions of the people? Otherwise what was the use of the prayer for direction, that these very men had asked Jeremiah to offer, and the reply to which was his unpopular message? If God's will and truth always agreed with our private notions, what would be the good of revelation and commandment? It is in the conflict of the two that the chief value of the Divine message is to be found.

II. THE PRIDE OF MAN. We are expressly told that they were "proud men" who rejected the prophet's message. The rest of the people seem to have been willing to acquiesce in it. There is nothing so blinding as pride. Your proud man is an inevitable bigot. By undue assurance of knowledge he closes the avenues of fresh knowledge and limits his own possession of it. Thus pride cuts away the ground beneath its own feet.

Ver. 3.—*The credulity of unbelief.* I. UNBELIEF INVOLVES CREDULITY. Johanan and his companions here bring before us a striking instance of the credulity of unbelief. Refusing to admit that Jeremiah was divinely inspired, they asserted that he was instigated by Baruch the scribe. Now, we have seen Baruch acting solely as the amanuensis and spokesman of the prophet—indeed, effacing himself with genuine humility and wisdom to serve the prophet the more faithfully; could this man be the inspirer of his master's most decided utterances? The idea is preposterous. It is an evidence of gross

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credulity—the credulity that believes in one's own inventions, though they are infinitely less reasonable than the opposite ideas they are set up to oppose. All unbelief is belief—it is belief in the negation of a proposition, and it requires as much evidence as the proposition it denies. It also has its consequences in reason which should be followed out remorselessly. Defenders of the faith have been too apologetic. They would often have been wiser if they had turned the flank of opponents and exposed the weakness of their position. It might often be shown that, in accepting this position, the opponents were standing on less firm ground than that which they dispute. For something must be true. If we came down to absolute nihilism, and discovered that nothing existed, even that discovery would be a truth. The absolute rejection of one proposition involves the acceptance of its opposite. But this opposite may be beset with heavier difficulties or favoured with weaker evidences than those which accompany the rejected proposition. If so, to accept the opposite proposition is really a mark of greater credulity than to admit that which presented the first claims.

II. THE CREDULITY OF UNBELIEF MAY BE ILLUSTRATED IN THE CONTROVERSIES OF THE AGE. Consider it in relation to the main topics of these controversies, viz.: 1. *The being of God.* If there be no God, then the world must be eternal or self-created—conclusions which may be shown to leave more difficulties than the hypothesis of a Creator—and all the best thoughts of the highest orders of minds must be misconceptions—a strange result for those who would regard the mind of man as the highest existence in the universe. 2. *The immortality of the soul.* Difficulties beset the theory of immortality. But what greater difficulties they have to face who, first believing in God (and we now have a right to start from that position), hold that the deepest appetite of man is destined never to be satisfied, that his highest aspirations are directed to an impossibility, and that his greatest powers are doomed to be blighted before they have grown to their full development? What credulity is required to make us believe that a good God could create a Tantalus! 3. *The inspiration of the Bible.* If the Bible be not inspired of God, the first literature of the world, containing by far its deepest, wisest, purest thoughts, and exercising unbounded influence for good, is founded on a delusion or a lie; for the writers of the Bible plainly claim to be inspired. 4. *The Divine origin of Christianity.* Christianity is the greatest fact in history; it revolutionized the decaying life of the old world, and gave a fresh upward movement to humanity; it is now the leading factor in the highest life of the foremost races of mankind; and it claims to be Divine. It seems to some of us that to say this claim is false, and thus to force upon us the inevitable alternative that its founders were deluded, and that it is a mere growth of human thought and effort, requires a faith which is so irrational as to be justly characterized as credulity.

Vers. 8—13.—*Prophetic stones.* Jeremiah planting stones at the entrance of Pharaoh's palace was prophesying by act. The stones were mute prophecies interpreted by the verbal prophecies which in turn they were to confirm in the future. These prophetic stones have their lessons for us.

I. DIVINE PURPOSES ARE FIRM AND PERMANENT. They are like the great stones. Words are but air-waves; to the incredulous the strongest words may be mere sound and fury, signifying nothing; they melt as they fall. But in the stone we have weight, massiveness, persistence, something that cannot be blown aside with a breath, which will not fade with time, which may be handled, and which remains after it is forgotten, and can be exhumed after being buried. Such is a Divine purpose—thus solid and thus enduring.

II. DIVINE PURPOSES MAY BE HIDDEN UNTIL THE TIME FOR THE EXECUTION OF THEM. Jeremiah hides the stones. There are prophecies which have been uttered once, and the method of executing them kept secret from us until they are fulfilled. But many Divine purposes are never known till they are accomplished.

III. EARTHLY THRONES ARE SET UP ON FOUNDATIONS OF DIVINE APPOINTMENT. Jeremiah lays the foundation of a throne (ver. 10), and he does this as a servant of God executing his will. All earthly power rests ultimately upon a Divine sanction. Yet this fact does not diminish the human responsibility of those who exercise it. The prophet planted the stones; he did not erect the throne. Nebuchadnezzar would be responsible for the throne he set up, the way he established it, and the use he made of it.

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IV. GOD EMPLOYS HUMAN INSTRUMENTS IN THE EXECUTION OF HIS JUDGMENTS. Nebuchadnezzar is God's servant. There is a Divine economy in this. If evil cannot be stayed without the withdrawal of those liberties that God sees it to be right to leave intact, the harm of it may be mitigated by making it self-counteractive, the wickedness of one hindering or punishing that of another.

V. FLIGHT FROM THE JUDGMENT OF GOD IS IMPOSSIBLE. The Babylonian yoke was a Divine chastisement upon the Jews. They were urged by inspired prophets to submit to it as appointed by God. Some refused and fled to Egypt. But in Egypt they were neither out of the reach of God nor beyond the power of his instrument Nebuchadnezzar. There is no escape from God but by fleeing to God, no deliverance from the doom of sin but in submission to him against whom we have sinned.

VI. COMPANIONS IN GUILT WILL BE COMPANIONS IN DOOM. The Jews who fled to Egypt were to share the punishment of that nation. The Egyptians who harboured the Jews were to bring upon themselves the fate that followed the refugees.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 8—13.—*The stones of Tahpanhes.* Great uncertainty as to the fulfilment of this prophetic parable. Are we bound to assume that it was actually carried out? It is possible, according to some critics (but see Exposition on ch. xlvi. 13), that the accomplishment of the prediction, as of many others, was only contingent. It is very vivid and definite, but that is quite consistent with the intermediate occurrence of circumstances in the spiritual state of the Jewish sojourners that enabled God to cancel it. Just as at this time their disposition may have been alarmingly idolatrous and worldly, so at a later stage it may have changed.

I. WHAT THE PARABLE MAY HAVE SUGGESTED. 1. *The contingent certainty of Divine judgment.* The action may have represented, not only the sequence of events, but that of principles. If, then, the events did not occur, it would still remain true that, in the kingdom of God, such a dependence of principles is eternal; sin is ever nigh to cursing. So much is this the case, that it may be said to contain the elements of its own punishment, like the stones hidden in the clay. (1) The stones are hidden in the clay with which, although heterogeneous, they stand in a divinely appointed relation. (2) The interpretation given by the prophet further strengthened this impression in the minds of the spectators. It was the same power, viz. the Chaldean, which had already scourged Judah, that was to follow the remnant into distant Egypt. The continuity of the judgment with those which preceded it is thus forcibly set forth. Nebuchadnezzar, if or when he came, could not be mistaken for other than a divinely ordained instrument of vengeance. The advantage of such an understanding of the prophecy is obvious—it ceases to have a particular and transitory significance, and becomes at once necessary and universal. We need that lesson graven upon our hearts today: "The soul that sinneth it shall die;" "He that soweth to the flesh," etc. 2. *That dependence upon any earthly power is utterly vain.* Egypt is dreamt of as a refuge from their woes. Its power, typified by the clay of the kiln or brick-field, only overlies the power of God, typified by the stones. They would be in his hands still, although they knew it not. Through the clay of worldly dependence they must needs fall upon the stones of Divine judgment. Man cannot flee from his Maker. There is no earthly security from the consequences of sin. If the remnant of Judah, pursuing its tendency towards worldly mindedness and idolatry to the bitter end, should persist in putting its trust in the Egyptian power, to whose religion and life it was in such imminent danger of assimilating itself, woe to it! Through Pharaoh even will they be confronted with Nebuchadnezzar yet again. God is the only true Helper and Saviour, and in the practice of holiness and the precepts of true religion is security alone to be found. What assurance company can shield the sinner from the consequences of his misdeeds? And if God be for any man, who can be against him?

II. WHAT THE PARABLE MAY HAVE EFFECTED. It has been conjectured (by Naegelsbach and others) that the symbolic action of Jeremiah and its interpretation so forcibly appealed to the imagination and conscience of the Jews as to change their hearts. That some such consequence as this was intended seems very probable. If it resulted

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as they suppose, then the judgment was averted which depended upon their misconduct and worthiness. "God repented him of the evil." This is one of the great aims of such teaching—so to affect the heart through the imagination as to subdue its evil tendencies and lead it to the pursuit of righteousness and truth. The crowded Jewish colony of Alexandria may then be taken, not as a refutation of the words of Jeremiah, but as a proof that these words produced their legitimate impression, and brought about a deep and lasting reformation. The lesson of all which is that the relation between sin and its punishment, and the futility of earthly securities and screens from Divine vengeance, cannot be too forcibly represented. God will bless the faithful preaching of his Word, and is infinitely more willing to have mercy than to prove his predictions by allowing men to harden their hearts.—M.

Vers. 1—13.—*Hearts set to do evil.* Such were the hearts of these Jews. They show concerning such—

I. THAT AFFLICTION WILL NOT ALTER THEM. It is not always true that affliction will make the heart better. It serves this blessed end with some—cf. "Before I was afflicted I went," etc.—but not with all. Did not in this case, but though "often reproved," they only "hardened their neck."

II. PRAYERS AND PROFESSION OF RELIGION DO NOT CONTROL THEM. They can go together. Alas! that it should be so; but they will not rule. They are but so many cobwebs, which the heart set to do evil will break through as easily as a man breaks through the gossamer filaments which stretch across the path on which he is walking.

III. PRETEXTS AND PRETENCES ARE ALWAYS READY TO EXCUSE THEM. "Thou speakest falsely," they said to God's prophet. "Baruch . . . hath set thee on." *So*, so pitifully, they try to justify themselves.

IV. GOD DOES NOT INTERFERE TO PREVENT THEM. We often wish he would, depriving us of our liberty when it would only do us ill. But his method is to let us go our own ways, and if, as is so wretchedly often the case, they be evil ways, then, when we are filled with the fruit of them, we may come to a better mind, and so more firmly choose the good which we should have chosen at the first. How much happier a man for ever that younger son would have been if he had never previously left his father's home for that far country!

V. TERRIBLE JUDGMENTS ARE SURE TO FOLLOW THEM. They did in this case; they always do sooner or later. For the will *must* bend to God.

VI. GOD'S FAITHFUL SERVANTS WILL NOT BE DISMAYED BY THEM. See how bold as a lion is the prophet of God; how fearlessly he denounces his people's sin. Oh, for fidelity such as that in all the prophets of the Lord!—C.

Vers. 8—13.—*Building on the sand.* The Jews trusted in the strength of Pharaoh. They had done this before, but to no purpose. The prophets of God always protested against such trust (cf. Isa. xxxi.). Here, in spite of all warning, they are resolving upon such reliance again. But they were building on sand. The destruction came; the very destruction they thought, by their acting as they had done, they had certainly escaped. Thus do and shall be done by all who are like them. Such are—

I. They that think to establish themselves by wicked ways.

II. Those that rely upon men and not on God.

III. Those that trust to uncertain riches.

IV. Those that think saying "Lord, Lord," whilst living ungodly lives, will save them.—C.

Ver. 1.—*The view of a prophet's complete work.* I. A PROPHET IS ONE WHO HAS TO SPEAK THE WORDS OF JEHOVAH. Not his own words, not the words of other men. This applies to the substance of the message; for it is plain that each prophet has his own style. The chief thing to be remembered is that a prophet never goes forth on his own impulse. Men in their zeal for right may go out to protest against wrong and fight against it, but this does not make them prophets. The prophet's strength and claim and responsibility lie in this, that he can ever preface his announcements by "Thus saith the Lord." And all preachers and teachers will approach the

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prophet's position just in proportion to the extent in which they can fill their addresses with Divine declarations. The essential elements of prophecy can never be out of place.

II. HE HAS TO SPEAK ALL THE WORDS OF JEHOVAH. The prophet is not to be an eclectic, picking out some of God's words as suitable and others as unsuitable. God's omniscience can alone judge what is suitable. If to him it seems suitable a word should be spoken, then it is suitable. God speaks not to apparent needs, but to real ones. God, always saying something for the present, makes his weightiest words to bear upon the future. The responsibility of the prophet is simply that of being a brave and faithful messenger.

III. HE IS SENT TO SPEAK THESE WORDS. He does not merely take up words of Jehovah which he thinks suitable for the emergency. This is his work to act as a special messenger from Heaven. Others have to expound the Word already spoken, already written; but the prophet hears a voice directly from the excellent glory, "Go and make known my will to men." And in all prophecy there is evidence, to one who will look for it, that the prophet is a sent man.

IV. HE HAS TO SPEAK WORDS TO THOSE ON WHOM GOD HAS A CLAIM. Jehovah is not only the God of Jeremiah, he is the God of all the people. This was an historical fact of which they could not get rid. It was the glory, security, and blessing of the people, if only they could see it. And is not Jehovah also our God?—God coming for a while more closely in contact with one nation, that ultimately he may be in contact with all. If we admit the claim of Jesus, we admit the claim of Jehovah also. He speaks through ancient prophets to us, because the essentials of their message have to do with the permanent life of men.

V. HE SPEAKS TO ALL THE PEOPLE. In this particular instance the request came from all the people, so the message was correspondingly to all. Prophets, of course, had often messages for particular men, but even these messages are so founded upon general principles as to become worthy the attention of all. Prophecy concerns man as man; it meets the young with dawning consciousness, and grasps the old till their latest hour.

VI. THE PROPHET MUST TAKE CARE TO MAKE AN END OF HIS PROPHECY. He does not simply cease speaking; he has to make people feel he has said all he has to say, and that the time has come for them to have their say, or rather for them to enter with promptitude and devotion upon corresponding deeds. They may not hear all they would like to know, and thus it must be made clear they have been told all that it is good for them to know. With God all things are for edifying, not to inform curiosity or comply with every actual desire.—Y.

Vers. 8—13.—*The visitation upon Egypt.* Here again is one of the symbolic acts which the prophets were commanded at times to perform. So the hiding of the girdle by Euphrates (ch. xiii.), the commanded celibacy of the prophet (ch. xvi.), the dashing of the potter's bottle to pieces (ch. xix.). But while these symbolic acts are described in terms which make them perfectly clear, the hiding of the great stones mentioned here needs more full explanation than we can reach to get the significance it. Still, this much of the drift of the action we perceive that Jehovah will make quite manifest, that Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Egypt is one divinely ordained and sustained. Not, of course, that Egypt is to suffer simply because these men have gone there; its idolatries are the deepest ground of its calamities. But the delusion of the men of Judah must be looked at in the light of the sufferings of Egypt. In all this experience of death and captivity and slaughter, of temple-burning and image-breaking; in all this entire appropriation of Egypt by the Babylonian king, these men of Judah must not expect to escape. There is no second land of Goshen for them—a place of immunity and peace. If only they had stayed where they thought there would be no safety, then they would have been safe; and going where they made sure of safety, they found the worst of ruin. It reads as if Egypt was to come under Babylon more even than Jerusalem had done.—Y.

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EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XLIV.

Jeremiah's debate with the Jewish fugitives in Pathros; his last prophecy.

Vers. 1—14.—Accusation brought against the obstinately idolatrous people.

Ver. 1.—**Which dwell**; rather, *which dwelt.* It appears from this verse that the Jewish fugitives had separated in Egypt, some going to the two northern frontier cities, Migdol (on which see R. S. Poole, 'The Cities of Egypt,' ch. viii.) and Tahpanhes or Daphnæ, others further south to Noph, *i.e.* Memphis, or, less probably, Napata (see on ch. ii. 16), and Pathros (*i.e.* Upper Egypt; comp. Isa. xi. 11).

Ver. 6.—**Was kindled in**; rather, *burned up.*

Ver. 7.—**Against your souls**; *i.e.* against yourselves. The "soul" is the personality.

Ver. 8.—**That ye might cut yourselves off**; rather, *that ye might cut (them) off from you.* Who are meant is clear from ver. 7.

Ver. 9.—**Have ye forgotten**, etc.? The prophet wonderingly asks if they have forgotten the sins of their forefathers and the consequent calamities. No other explanation of this present idolatry seems possible; and yet how passing strange is it! **Their wives.** The Hebrew has "his wives," *i.e.* according to Kimchi and Hitzig, the wives of each of the kings (sometimes great patrons of idolatry). But it is better to adopt, with Ewald, Graf, and Dr. Payne Smith, the reading of the Septuagint, "his princes."

Ver. 10.—**They are not humbled**; rather, *not made contrite* (literally, *not crushed*, viz. by repentance).

Ver. 11.—**To cut off all Judah**; *i.e.* the Judah in Egypt, not that in Babylon. Notice the qualification of this too absolute statement in vers. 14, 28.

Ver. 14.—**They have a desire**; literally, *they lift up their soul* (comp. ch. xxii. 27).

Vers. 15—19.—The reply of the people. The special mention of the women suggests that the occasion of the gathering was a festival in honour of the Queen of Heaven.

Ver. 15.—**Had burned incense**; rather, *were burning incense.* The practice was still going on.

Ver. 17.—**Whatsoever thing goeth forth**; rather, *the whole word which hath gone forth.* A particular vow to the divinity is meant. **The queen of heaven** (see on ch. vii. 18). Then **had we plenty of victuals**, etc. An extremely important passage, as revealing the view taken of their misfortunes by Jews of the average type. Jeremiah regarded the misfortunes of his country as proofs of the displeasure of Jehovah; these Jews, on the other hand, of his impotence.

Ver. 19.—This part of the reply belongs to the women, who declare that, their husbands' consent having been given to their vow, Jeremiah has no right to interfere (see Numb. xxx. 6, 7). **Burned . . . poured**, etc.; rather, *burn . . . pour.* **Did we**, etc.; rather, *do we*, etc. **To worship her.** The sense of the Hebrew is doubtful; but the best reading seems that of Rashi, Graf, and Dr. Payne Smith, "to make her image." **Without our men**; rather, *without our husbands.*

Vers. 20—30.—Jeremiah's rejoinder.

Ver. 21.—**Remember them**; *i.e.* the repeated acts of idolatry.

Ver. 25.—**With your hand**; rather, *with your hands.* **Ye will surely accomplish**, etc.; rather, *ye shall*, etc., *by all means perform your vows, and take the consequence.* The irony of the passage is lost by the "will" of the Authorized Version.

Ver. 26.—**My Name shall no more be named.** Because no Jews will be left alive in Egypt.

Ver. 28.—**Yet a small number**, etc. Isaiah's doctrine of the remnant. In the midst of judgment, God remembers mercy, and his ancient covenant. A remnant is saved as the nucleus of a regenerate people.

Ver. 29.—**A sign**; rather, *the sign.*

Ver. 30.—**I will give Pharaoh-hophra**, etc. The sign consists in the capture of Hophra by his deadly enemies. Henceforth he will live in constant alarm, for he is in the hands of those "that seek his life." All that we know of the fate of Hophra (Apries) is derived from Herodotus (ii. 169), who states that Amasis "gave Apries over into the hands of his former subjects, to deal with as they chose. Then the Egyptians took him and strangled him" (see further on ch. xlvi. 13).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—10.—*Warnings from the past.* History has its moral lessons. We who are heirs of the ages should learn wisdom from the mistakes as well as from the good examples of the past. Let us consider how this may be done.

I. WARNINGS FROM THE SIN OF THE PAST. Jeremiah calls upon the Jews in Egypt

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to reflect on the wicked conduct of their nation, tracing it back from the present through successive generations of iniquitous court and private life. It is a gloomy task, but a wholesome one. Tacitus was, perhaps, the greatest moralist of his age, because he saw into the moral side of history, and ruthlessly exposed the vice and cruelty and treachery which underlay the splendour of Roman imperialism. Because we can read history with some measure of detachment from the passions and prejudices of the hour, we may learn to see therein the character of actions which are closely parallel to others nearer home. Thus the past may become a mirror of the present, and one that rectifies the images from the confusion which accompanies the direct vision of what is very closely connected with our own person.

II. WARNINGS FROM THE DIVINE VOICE IN THE PAST. God had instructed and urged his people to forsake their sins. He had not left them in the dark or unchecked—"Howbeit I sent unto you all my servants the prophets." This had been done with earnestness and emphasis—"rising early and sending them." It was a revelation of the evil character of their deeds—"this abominable thing;" an appeal to them to cease from such wickedness—"Oh, do not this abominable thing!" and a declaration of the Divine abhorrence of their conduct—"that I hate." All this has been said concerning the wickedness of the past; but it is to be reflected upon for its application to the present. We also may find profit in considering the ancient voices of heaven. The warnings of the Bible may be re-read and re-applied in our own day. If we see no new Jeremiah, we have the inspired words of the old Hebrew prophet, and they are as true now as ever. What God hates he hates eternally. What he forbids is always wrong. The object of his urgent appeal should command submission at all times.

III. WARNINGS FROM THE PUNISHMENTS OF THE PAST. The object of punishment is twofold. First, it concerns the guilty; secondly, it has lessons for witnesses. It is chastisement to the offender, it is warning to others. No punishment would be just if it were simply given as a deterrent. But being deserved and needful on account of the conduct of the victim, it is then utilized in perfect justice for the general benefit of the community. We should be thankful for the fact that the fate of others is not altogether obscure, so that we may profit by the sad lessons of their experience.

Ver. 16.—*Open rebellion.* I. GOD LEAVES US FREE TO ACCEPT OR REJECT HIS AUTHORITY. Whatever may be urged from the standpoints of abstract philosophy and of speculative theology, in practice, as Butler says, we all act as though we were free. In the Bible, too, this practical freedom of the will is constantly implied and appealed to. Though we have no moral right to renounce the Law of God, though we shall suffer if we do so, the terrible power of rebellion is entrusted to us that our loyalty may be proved and our service may remain free and willing.

II. ALL EVIL CENTRES IN THE WILL. The idolatrous Jews *will* not hearken to the word of Jeremiah. Herein lies the sum and substance of their offence. Depraved appetites and wicked passions are temptations to the evil will or products of its deeds. In themselves they are no more wicked than the external temptations which appeal to the purest elements of our common human nature. Guilt consists in yielding to them—in the act of the will that consents, indulges, or urges.

III. WILFUL REJECTION OF TRUTH IS REBELLION AGAINST GOD. Not to hearken is to revolt. We must be careful to distinguish pure intellectual doubt and unbelief from this revolt of the will against truth. The latter may not deny the correctness of what it rejects; it simply refuses to follow it. If it does fail to believe the truth, but through only wilfully closing all avenues of evidence, the blame of an evil will must be attached to it.

IV. SELF-WILL IS AN EVIL WILL. In rejecting the Divine message the idolatrous Jews insolently add, "We will certainly do the whole word which hath gone forth out of our own mouth" (see ver. 17). 1. Self-will even in regard to *things innocent* in themselves is nevertheless an evil will. For we are not our own masters. The servant is wrong if he disobey his master, though to do a harmless act. The soldier is guilty in disobeying orders, whatever other course he may take. We are "under authority." If our Captain says, "Go," we are not free to stand for the most innocent reason. 2. Self-will is too often directed to *evil things.* Those Jews who deliberately rejected the Divine message chose to perform acts of idolatry of their own will. Our will is corrupt.

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Left to itself it chooses much that is evil. To keep it pure we must lift it up to union with a higher will. When it breaks loose and defiantly chooses its own private course, its evil nature will incline it to a bad course.

V. COMPANIONSHIP IN SIN BECOMES CONSPIRACY IN GREATER SIN. The husbands support their wives in the evil practices of the women, and together they declare that for the future they will pursue these practices openly and deliberately. But the closest relationship and the warmest affection are no reasons for defending wicked conduct, much less for encouraging and sharing it. When the love of husband and wife conflicts with the love of God, even that most near and sacred tie should yield to the highest of all obligations. Otherwise the marriage relation, which is instituted for the blessings of mutual comfort and happiness, becomes a curse.

Ver. 18.—*Chastisement misinterpreted.* I. IT IS POSSIBLE TO MISTAKE THE CAUSE AND PURPOSE OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN CHASTISEMENT. Instead of accepting their calamities as punishments for their sins against Jehovah, the Jews in Upper Egypt argue from them to conclusions of unbelief in the power and goodness of the God of their fathers. They are not alone in their error. The problem of suffering and its source and aim is profoundly difficult. The glib repetition of old platitudes only mocks at the mystery it can never solve. Job's friends were good men, and two of them able men; but "miserable comforters" were they all, because their explanation of the cause of the tragic agony before them was so utterly inadequate. Two reasons for error in the interpretation of chastisement may be detected in the case of Jeremiah's contemporaries. 1. *An evil disposition.* These men had no desire to recognize the hand of the true God in their experience. They had followed their wives in favouring the immoral rites of a heathenish cult. Jeremiah's teaching was rejected with insult; the idolatrous religion was grasped with obstinate self-will. Behaving in this way, the Jews in Upper Egypt were not in a fit state to judge fairly of the meaning of God's dealings with them. Our "views" of truth depend materially on our attitude towards it. Bad passions and a corrupt will prevent men at all times from profiting by chastisement. 2. *The delay of chastisement.* This was not contemporaneous with the sin. It would seem that the corruption which followed the reformation of Josiah was not so bad as that which preceded it. Yet it was after this that the blow fell. Now, a similar experience may often be noted. Charles II. was a worse king than James II., and Louis XV. than Louis XVI. The revolutions did not occur when things were at their worst. They took time to ripen. The chief causes of them were not their immediate antecedents. The same may be expected in private lives. Therefore it may require searching thought to trace the trouble down to its real root.

II. IT IS POSSIBLE TO FALL INTO RELIGIOUS ERROR THROUGH MISINTERPRETING GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN CHASTISEMENT. By a false inference drawn from the experience of trouble, the idolatrous Jews were led to fling off the last relic of their ancient faith, and to renew their allegiance to the heathen religion they had partially renounced in outward act, though not, as it now appears, in the inclinations of their hearts. Consider the process by which this result was reached. 1. *A delusion as to the nature of repentance and its effects.* The Jewish refugees had imagined that their abandonment of open idolatry would have warded off the impending doom. They were enraged at discovering their mistake, and they took the result as a reason for daring scepticism. Important lessons may be derived from their mistake, *e.g.* (1) that outward reformation is useless before God without heartfelt repentance; (2) that there are necessary consequences of sin which no repentance can obviate—improvidence leading to poverty, intemperance to disease, crime to secular punishment, in spite of all the genuine tears of a Magdalene; (3) that when God accepts repentance and forgives the penitent, it may still be necessary to chastise him for the good of his own soul. 2. *The mistake of judging of the truth of a religion by the worldly advantages that accrue from it.* Godliness has "promise of the life that now is" (1 Tim. iv. 8). Under the Old Testament economy this promise was emphasized. Nevertheless, even in the Jewish religion it was often recognized that suffering might fall upon the people of God (*e.g.* Ps. xxii.). With our fuller light, we know that the temporal advantages of religion are but a small part of its blessings; that under certain circumstances it may bring more worldly loss than gain (*e.g.* to the martyrs, etc.); that there are Christians who

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reckon that if in this life only they have hoped in Christ, they are of all men most pitiable (1 Cor. xv. 19). Therefore we should settle it well in our minds that, as worldly injustice and calamities of all kinds may fall upon the devoted servants of Christ, the experience of these things should not shake our faith. This fact needs to be well considered and realized, because there is no more frequent cause of sudden and violent scepticism than a series of great and inexplicable troubles. 3. *The sin of pursuing religion for its worldly profit.* Even if godliness is profitable for all things, it cannot be truly followed for the sake of gain. To choose our religion according to the advantages it may give us, is to subordinate truth to convenience, and to degrade to the position of a servant that which claims to rule as a master, or will have nothing to do with us.

Ver. 22.—*The limit of God's forbearance.* I. GOD'S FORBEARANCE IS LIMITED. There is no limit to his love. His mercy "endureth for ever." There is no limit to his patience, his endurance of the most provoking wickedness. But there is a limit to God's forbearance. Consider what determines this. 1. *Justice.* There is a point where necessary justice must interfere to prevent further wrong and punish what is already done. 2. *The good of the community.* Mercy to the criminal may involve injustice to the victim. There are abandoned wretches whom the world would find inestimable advantage in caging up out of the power of doing further mischief. There must be a point where their rights cease and the rights of others step in. In the Divine government this must be noted and acted on. 3. *The advantage of the offender.* It is a curse to a man to leave him for ever unchecked and unpunished. He may be left for a season to give all necessary scope for the operation of milder measures and for his own free repentance. But when the gentleness has failed, the only chance lies in some drastic treatment.

II. IT IS POSSIBLE TO REACH THE LIMIT OF GOD'S FORBEARANCE. It was reached by the antediluvians, by the cities of the plain, by the Jews at the time of the Captivity, by the Jews when Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus, by many a nation and many a man since. It may be reached by us. This subject, therefore, is not a question of abstract theology, touching only the ideal relations of Divine attributes. It is tremendously practical. 1. The limit may be reached in *our lifetime.* Men presume on their prosperity till God providentially strikes them down in desolation, and they learn in their anguish the folly of their long abuse of God's long-suffering mercy. 2. It will come to the impenitent in *the next life.* Death will bring it if it has been stayed during all the earthly life. The longer it is delayed the more fearful will be its consequences to those who "treasure up to themselves wrath in the day of wrath."

III. IT MUST BE UNSPEAKABLY TERRIBLE TO REACH THE LIMIT OF GOD'S FORBEARANCE. Then all the vials of wrath will be outpoured. The horror of the judgment ensuing can only be measured by the greatness of the forbearance which restrains it. If that were not very fearful, why should God hesitate so long in letting it loose? Why should he use all other possible means to prevent the necessity of resorting to it? Why should he urge and plead with us to hear his voice to-day and harden not our hearts?

Ver. 25.—*Sinful vows.* I. SINFUL VOWS ARE AMONG THE MOST WICKED OF SINS. Some sins are committed hastily and in passion, these with more deliberation; some without strong desire, these most earnestly.

II. IT IS A SIN TO PERFORM SINFUL VOWS. If we were not at liberty to make the vows, we are not at liberty to perform them. We cannot be bound to do that which we have no right to do. If we have promised to do an unlawful act, we should not consider that promise binding upon us, since our word cannot abrogate the law that forbids the act.

III. GOD LEAVES MEN FREE TO EXECUTE THEIR EVIL INTENTIONS. The Jews in Upper Egypt were to be left to the performance of their vows to the queen of heaven. This implied no sanction; it was only the withholding of forcible restraints. What a solemn responsibility lies in the fact that we have this large liberty after we have chosen an evil way, and before we are called to judgment for it!

IV. GOD SOMETIMES CEASES TO WARN MEN OF THE DANGER OF THEIR WICKED COURSES. They are then left to themselves till their sin ripens. It is a terrible fate, but consistent with the goodness of God, as we may be sure that, if God deliberately ceases

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to warn a man, it is because warnings are lost on him or simply harden him. We may so sin as to become "seared in our own conscience with a hot iron" (1 Tim. iv. 2).

V. THE FRUIT OF THE WICKED COURSES WHICH MEN HAVE CHOSEN FOR THEMSELVES WILL BE THE WORST PUNISHMENT OF THEM. They need no external penalties performed by executioners of justice. Sin is its own executioner, the natural effect of sin its own punishment. In the natural results that followed the performance of their wicked vows the idolatrous Jews will reap the bitterest harvest of retribution. "The sin, when it is full-grown, *bringeth forth* death" (Jas. i. 15).

Ver. 28.—*The remnant of the remnant.* Of the Jews who escaped the sword of Nebuchadnezzar in the invasion of their land, "a remnant" fled to Egypt; of this body of refugees "a remnant" was to survive the dangers that would destroy the greater part. Thus but a small number would return to Jerusalem in safety. For their folly in fleeing to Egypt the fugitives would suffer a second desolation, while the captives in Babylon and the patient poor people who remained in the land of their fathers would be spared. Yet even out of this further calamity some few would be brought in safety.

I. JUDGMENT IS TEMPERED WITH MERCY. Many are spared at the first blow. Some of these are only hardened in wickedness. A second blow falls. Still some are spared. God is reluctant to give his people up. If he can find room for any mercy in the midst of the severest judgment, he will exercise it.

II. GOD'S JUDGMENT IS DISCRIMINATING. Even now it must be so; for "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" But we do not yet know its purposes and its methods, and therefore to us it looks as though it could not take note of individual deserts. Ultimately we shall see how God has overlooked no exceptional case. Noah is picked out of the drowning world. Lot is remembered in Sodom. Elijah is provided for in the general drought. We can look for no such evidences of an interfering Providence in earthly things now, perhaps, but the truth they illustrate holds good, and must work its blessed results in the day of final account. Natural selection does not always result in the survival of the morally fittest on earth. On the contrary, the good may become martyrs, the bad triumphant tyrants. But we see only the opening acts of the drama. The final catastrophe will reveal the justice that regulates.

III. LEFT TO THEMSELVES, NO MEN COULD ESCAPE THE DOOM OF SIN. In the eternal judgment there could not even be a remnant of a remnant. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." All would, therefore, receive the wages of sin.

IV. BY THE REDEMPTION OF CHRIST ALL WHO HAVE SINNED MAY BE SAVED. This is large enough to deliver, not merely a remnant of a remnant, but every man who has fallen, however low he lies in the mire.

V. AT FIRST BUT A REMNANT OF A REMNANT ARE SAVED BY CHRIST. The question whether few were to be saved was not to be answered for the satisfaction of idle curiosity (Luke xiii. 23). But that only a few sought the grace of Christ at first is a historical fact. The number has grown wonderfully, and yet how large a part of the world must be accounted still dark and dead in sin! But the few are saved that they may win the many. The first disciples became apostles. The small remnant laid the foundation of a great nation. The Church is called to evangelize the world.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—14 (*vide* ch. xliii. 8—13).—*The condition of hardened sinners desperate.* I. WHY IS IT SO? 1. *Because repeated warnings have been rejected.* (Vers. 4, 5.) These have been inspired and infallible. Had they believed ever so little they might have trusted implicitly what was spoken, accompanied as it was with such miraculous credentials. We, in these last times, have had the Lord himself. He has revealed the *heart* of the Father. (2) They were sufficiently numerous and seasonable. God "rose up early and sent them." He sent them *all.* No opportunity or peculiarity of individual influence was omitted. Christ is greater than all the prophets put together,

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and his gospel is universally declared and universally authoritative over the consciences of men. God cannot send another messenger, nor would it avail if he could. 2. *Because the lessons of experience have been ignored.* (Vers. 9, 10.) How terribly severe had not these been! It was scarcely possible for greater temporal punishments to be inflicted. Yet it was in the discipline of these judgments they were to have been saved. The path of transgressions, as the sinner looks back upon it, is marked by ruin and death. Yet will he not repent. 3. *Their persistent disobedience is an intolerable offence to God.* (Ver. 8.) God's judgments are not exhausted, but his patience may be. The history of offence and punishment will not repeat itself indefinitely. There are abysses of wrath. There is an eternal fire. Let them beware lest they be utterly consumed.

II. WHAT ARE THE SIGNS THAT IT IS SO? 1. *The Word of God is wholly against them.* The indictment has no redeeming feature. 2. *The pathos and pitifulness of God's entreaty.* (Vers. 4, 7.) There is compassion in the Divine mind because of the consequences that impend. Who so able to understand the sinner's circumstances as his Father? He who can see before and after, and who can fathom the mystery of iniquity, fears for his erring child.

III. WHAT ELEMENT OF HOPE, IF ANY, IS STILL LEFT FOR THEM? 1. *God still pleads.* Silence would mean hopelessness. Whilst his servant is authorized to speak, there may remain a way of escape. 2. *The fatherly compassion his voice betrays.* There are tears in the entreaty: "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!" It is the birth-cry of an evangel; a prophecy of Jesus. Mercy may move and melt where judgment has failed. "For the love of Christ constraineth us," etc. (2 Cor. v. 14); "But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. v. 8).—M.

Vers. 15—23.—*Credentials of religion.* Very important to know why we prefer one religious system to another, and also why we ought to prefer it. A man is continually in need of having to give a reason for the hope that is in him. The higher religions find the field already occupied by many great systems, and have to vindicate themselves. The arguments employed here are those most commonly adduced, because most superficial. As appealing to the sensuous and material side of human nature, they are very influential.

I. WORLDLY ARGUMENTS FOR A RELIGION. Here they are employed on behalf of a false religion, an idolatry; but they are often made use of in recommending true religion. They are generally of two classes, viz. pertaining: 1. *To authority.* The idolatry here defended was (1) general and fashionable; (2) ancient; (3) patronized by royalty; (4) practised in the mother city of God's people. 2. *To tendency.* It was alleged to have promoted prosperity and peace.

II. THEIR INCONCLUSIVENESS. 1. *Authority is only valuable as it helps to establish truth.* Sin in its most flagrant forms, ignorance and inhumanity, have been more and longer prevalent than the greatest religions the world has seen. The most cruel and debasing religions are the most ancient in most countries. The only authority which can be admitted in such a connection is that of the best, *i.e.* the wisest and purest. 2. *The tendency argument is open to similar objections.* It is a great deal to say in favour of a religion that it has promoted the welfare and happiness of its supporters; but it is not so easy to prove it. Here the prophet alleges that it was their idolatry which lay at the root of all the misery of the people of Judah. It requires a very wide, varied, and lengthened induction of a people's circumstances ere such a statement is legitimate either way. And even if it were made out to one's satisfaction that a religious system had a beneficial effect upon the material condition of a people, it must still be remembered that man is a spiritual being, and that his moral and spiritual nature will sooner or later enter an imperious claim to attention and satisfaction. Only that which is right and true can meet the wants of the human spirit under all circumstances. And God is the one Being who can satisfy the spiritual aspirations and needs of his creatures. If the best and the holiest of men cannot be content with material advantages and comfort, but are ever yearning for something beyond, it is evident that utilitarianism must be interpreted in a very spiritual sense indeed ere it can pass muster as a tolerable criterion of any religion. It is chiefly because Christianity has

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revealed a Divine communion and a universal moral basis that it is destined to supplant all other creeds. But at the same time, it is also enforced by the test of utility in its more material aspect. No religion has so advanced the comfort, civilization, and peace of this world.—M.

Vers. 26—28.—*The danger of corrupting true religion.* God has from the beginning been solicitous for the purity of his revelation and worship. He would never suffer his ordinances to be tampered with, or share his honour with other gods. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Deut. vi. 13; Luke iv. 8).

I. IT HAS BEEN GUARDED BY AWFUL SANCTIONS. Frequently in Old Testament history the death-penalty was inflicted upon spiritual pretenders, false prophets, and idolatrous worshippers of Jehovah. The warning of the text is very significant; a time was to come when no Jew would any more swear by Jehovah in Egypt, for the very good reason that there would be none there. "In the form of asseveration the Name of Jehovah would be still retained, although they had long since been devoted to the service of other gods. But Jehovah, who is a jealous God, rejects honour and acknowledgment which he must share with others; and so his Name shall no longer be heard from the mouth of any Jews in Egypt" (Hitzig). In the New Testament men are warned of making the Word of God "a cloke for lasciviousness;" of "perishing in the gainsaying of Core;" of tasting of the powers of the world to come, and falling back; of making gain of godliness; of handling the Word of God deceitfully, and wresting it to their own destruction; or of adding aught to the revealed truth (Rev. xxii. 18, 19).

II. REASONS FOR THIS SEVERITY. 1. *Objective.* (1) The slow advance of truth. (2) The costliness of the Divine relation. 2. *Subjective.* (1) Partly in the very nature of the case—moral simplicity being sacrificed in the self-consciousness of a corrupt worship. (2) The necessity of inspiration by the truth in order to the spiritual welfare and true immortality of man.—M.

Vers. 1—30.—*Jeremiah's last sermon.* There are other prophecies of Jeremiah recorded in this book in the chapters that remain, but this discourse is the last that we know of his delivering. And with it the curtain falls upon this great prophet of God; upon Baruch, his beloved companion and helper; and upon the wretched Jews for whose good he had laboured, but in vain. A long interval separates it from that in the previous chapter; for we see the people not now at Tahpanhes, at the border of Egypt, but gathering from all parts of the land to Pathros, to a great heathen festival there. And a very awful discourse it is. There is not one word of gospel in it, but the boom of the heavy bell of doom is heard resounding all through it—not one solitary chime of grace, or mercy, or hope anywhere. It is like the words of the Son of man when he comes to judge the world, and all nations are brought before him, to those on his left hand. They are told their sin and their doom. They make such defence as they can, which is rather a defiance than a defence; they are answered, and their sentence is pronounced again. There is throughout both these discourses nought but "a fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation." "There remaineth no more sacrifice for sin." Such sermons might well have suggested these apostolic words. In this one note—

I. ITS COMMENCEMENT—THE INDICTMENT OF THE CONDEMNED. The prophet reminds them that they had seen God's judgments upon their brethren and fathers, and they knew the cause, that it was their sin against God. They had heard warning after warning addressed to themselves against the same sin. And not only had these warnings been repeated, but many messengers had been sent, and these had given their message with all earnestness and zeal, in season and out of season, and God himself had deigned to entreat with them and plead with them, saying, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!" But they had disregarded, despised, disobeyed all, and they were not humbled (ver. 10) even now. Therefore was their judgment pronounced against them and their doom was fixed.

II. THE ANSWER OF THE PEOPLE. They would not believe in their doom. They resolved to persist in their sin. They declared they were every way better off in serving idols than in serving God.

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III. THE PROPHET'S REPLY AND REITERATION OF GOD'S JUDGMENT AGAINST THEM.

CONCLUSION. As we read and ponder this terrible chapter, and remember that as its declarations concerning the past were true, so also were those that related to the future; for the judgment came upon them to the uttermost, far more than fell on those in Babylon. What can our hearts say to this? "Who would not fear thee, O Lord?" "Keep back thy servant . . . from presumptuous sins."—C.

Vers. 1—30.—*The end of Jeremiah; or, going down in clouds.* With this chapter Jeremiah disappears from view. The sadness which surrounded his first ministry accompanies it to the last and deepens at its close; like a sunset in clouds, going down in darkness and storm. The path along which he had been led had been a *via crucis*, a *via dolorosa* indeed; a lifelong tragedy, an unceasing pain. We can only hope that death came soon to him after his recorded history closes. We have seen him torn from his native land and carried down to Egypt. We see him in the forty-third chapter at the border of the land; in this, in the heart of Egypt, at Pathros, probably forced to witness the degrading idolatry of his people, and unable to do aught to prevent it. An idol festival, accompanied, doubtless, with all the wonted pollutions of such worship, is proceeding, and he lifts up his voice once more in stern protest. But in vain, as heretofore. He vanishes from our view at an hour when his countrymen, so far from being less addicted to idols, were now open in their sin, vaunting it and declaring their determination to adhere to it, and their regret that they had ever done otherwise. What a farewell between a minister of God and the people of his charge! There never was but one other like it—the farewell of him who said, as he wept over another doomed Jerusalem and a future Jewish people, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." What became of Jeremiah from this date we know not. "No man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day." "There is the Christian tradition resting doubtless on some earlier belief, that the long tragedy of his life ended in actual martyrdom, and that the Jews at Tahpanhes, enraged by his rebukes, at last stoned him to death." The testimony to the martyrs at the close of the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews is thought to contain allusion to him: "They were stoned"—so we read. There is a Jewish tradition, however, which says that he made his escape to Babylon, but Josephus, like the Bible, is utterly silent as to the prophet's end. And it has been suggested that the tradition of the Jew and the silence of the historian are alike owing to a desire to gloss over some great crime. The suggestion is a probable one. "But he did not need a death by violence to make him a true martyr. To die with none to record the time or manner of his death was the right end for one who had spoken all along, not to win the praise of men, but because the Word of the Lord was in him as 'a burning fire.' The darkness and doubt that brood over the last days of the prophet's life are more significant than either of the issues which present themselves to men's imaginations as the winding up of his career." "But a careful examination of his writings show that, whilst the earlier ones are calmer, loftier, more uniform in tone, the latter show marks of age and weariness and sorrow, and are more strongly imbued with the language of individual suffering." How glad we would have been had the clouds lifted ere he died, and a gleam of sunshine had irradiated the hitherto almost unbroken gloom! Some of the prophets were permitted to have a blessed outlook into the better days that were coming. He who wrote the closing portion of Isaiah's prophecies did so; like Moses from Mount Pisgah. But it was not so to be with this prophet of God. His sun was to go down in clouds, and, though he had faithfully kept God's commandments, there was not for him in this life any "great reward." Though out of love for his countrymen he had refused the offer of a peaceful and honoured home in Babylon, like Moses, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God," he yet failed to win their affection or obedience; and they remained in the same evil mind to the last. He had walked in the fear of the Lord. But those ways had not been for him "ways of pleasantness," nor its paths "paths of peace." The broken-hearted old man appeals to God and man, "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow." The twenty-second psalm—that which seems to tell so clearly of the sufferings of our Lord—is thought by many to have been written by him, and to tell of his own deep distress. Priest, patriot, prophet, martyr, hero of the faith indeed, what a life was thine from beginning to end, from thy first call by God to thy last

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rejection by men! These lines, translated for our day, and sung by our comfortable congregations—with what consistency they who sing them best know—

"If I find him, if I follow,
What his guerdon here?
Many a sorrow, many a labour,
Many a tear;"

—are applicable enough to one like that great prophet of God, whose career began, continued, and, most of all, ended, in sorrow, labour, and tears. But the review of such a ministry must assuredly have its lessons. As we think of it are we not reminded—

I. OF "THE MAN OF SORROWS," OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST? (Cf. homily on *Jeremiah's ministry*, vol. i. p. 9.) No doubt other great servants of God, whose ministry and especially whose end have been like that of Jeremiah, come into the mind. John the Baptist in Bible history, and Savonarola in later days. The parallel between this great Florentine preacher and our prophet has often been noticed. The insistance upon spiritual religion, the sad and terrible close of his career,—these have led many to look upon Savonarola as the Jeremiah of the Middle Ages. But these resemblances are incidental and undesigned. That, however, between our Lord and his honoured servant who, in so many ways, preceded him, is not incidental, nor can it be called undesigned. But whilst the prophet is like our Lord in so many respects, yet, great as were his sorrows, those of the Man of sorrows were greater still. For our Lord knew more of the evil of sin and hated it more intensely. He sacrificed more and endured more. And so the experience of the prophets, like that of all God's servants, only goes to show that Christ has sounded deeper depths of sorrow than any that his servants can ever know.

"Christ leads us through no darker room
Than he's been through before."

Hence always "underneath," however deep the depths out of which we cry, "are the everlasting arms" of his sympathy and love and help.

II. OF THE LIGHTNESS OF OUR BURDENS COMPARED WITH THOSE OF MANY OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD? How it shames us to think of the things we murmur about, when we contrast them with what such men as Jeremiah continually endured! Surely as we think of the severity of his cross, and especially that of our Saviour, we shall cease to complain of what ours may be.

III. OF WHAT THE GRACE OF GOD CAN DO? Did the prophet of God endure and contend so nobly, and was he faithful unto death? But is not "Jesus Christ the same yesterday," etc.? Then he who so strengthened his servants in days gone by will do the same still. Let us, therefore, go forward without fear.

IV. OF THE NECESSITY OF COUNTING THE COST ERE WE ENTER UPON THE SERVICE OF GOD? We see in the career of Jeremiah what may be required of us. Our Lord said to one candidate for discipleship, "The foxes have holes, and," etc. He would have the man consider if he were prepared to bear a life like that. And as we read what has been demanded of the Lord's servants, and may be of us, it is well that we, too, should count the cost. But do not count it so as to decline it; no, but that you may hasten to the treasure store of Christ, to the riches of his grace who will make his strength perfect in our weakness.

V. OF THE GREAT ARGUMENT FOR A FUTURE LIFE WHICH SUCH A CAREER AS THAT OF JEREMIAH FURNISHES? We have seen how uninterruptedly sad his life was, and how darkly it ended. Now, can any say that there is nothing more for such a man as that; that he and all they "who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished"—that is, the noblest, the purest, the best; those whose lives were beautiful, brave, God-like, —that *these* have *perished*? And yet, if death ends all, they have. It is incredible.

VI. IF SUCH MEN DEEMED IT WELL TO SACRIFICE ALL THEIR PRESENT FOR THE FAVOUR OF GOD, ARE WE WISE WHO REFUSE TO SACRIFICE ANYTHING, who love the world and cling to it and make it our good?—C.

Ver. 4.—*The mind of God towards sin and sinners.* "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!" Idolatry is the sin specially referred to here. And it was indeed

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an "abominable thing." Pollution, cruelty, degradation, were inseparably associated with it. But the words may be applied *to all sin*—should be so applied. For *what is sin?* It is the acting out of that evil corrupt nature which we know to our cost lurks within us all. It is the stream that naturally flows from an evil fountain, the fruit that is sure to grow on a corrupt tree. Now, this view declares the mind of God—

I. TOWARDS SIN. 1. *He calls it "this abominable thing."* Thus he brands it. See how justly. For what do we call abominable? *Is wrong done to a benefactor abominable?* Is not every sin such a wrong? God does not command more than he deserves when he says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," etc. What do we not owe to him? and how do we requite him? *Is wrong done to one who has entrusted his goods to us* that we may employ them for him, who has made us his stewards that we may employ rightly that which he has committed to our care,—is faithlessness to such abominable? But is not sin precisely such a wrong? Our mind, affections, will, our body with all its faculties and passions,—what are they aught else but our Maker's goods with which, as stewards, he has entrusted us? Let conscience declare the use we have made of them—that sin makes of them. *Is wrong done to the defenceless and innocent abominable?* Do we not cry out loudly against such a one? But is not sin such a wrong? We sin not to ourselves. We entail the consequences of our actions on those who cannot defend themselves, who are utterly innocent, and who will surely suffer by what we do. No man dieth to himself. He drags down in the vortex in which he himself is engulfed children, friends, neighbours, companions, all whom he has influenced and helped to make sinful like himself. *Is wrong done to vast numbers abominable,* so that when we hear of how one has brought ruin upon multitudes our anger against him grows the more? Surely it is so. But where do the ever-widening circles of sin's deadly influence stop? How wide an area do they enfold? "Jeroboam the son of Nebat . . . made Israel to sin." *Is that which pollutes and defiles,* which is sensual and unclean, abominable? But sin is guilty of all this. For all these reasons and others sin is an abominable thing. 2. *He hates it.* "Do not . . . *that I hate!*" God hates nothing that he has made. To us some creatures are hateful and some persons. But not so to God. He does not hate even the sinner, but only his sin. It is not alone that it is abominable in its own nature that he hates it, but it *works such ruin,* spreads sorrow and desolation far and wide. *It has opened and peoples the abodes of the lost.* And *it does despite and dishonour to the Son of God.* How, then, can God do otherwise than hate it?

II. TOWARDS THE SINNER. Note the pleading tone of this verse, "Oh, do not," etc.! What pity, what compassion, what yearning love, are all discernible in this beseeching entreaty which God addresses to the sinner! "Hear, then, God say to you, 'Do it not!' Now, what are you going to do? Do you mean to tell me that you will persist in it? *Do you really mean that?* Now, think! Do you really mean to go on sinning in the face of such a message as this?—with conscience smarting, and saying in its guilty smart, *Do not that abominable thing!* with memory weighted with the recollection of past transgressions, and saying by the leaden burden which it carries, *Do not that abominable thing!* With all this, and much more, do you mean to say that you will continue in sin? With remorse, like spiritual tempest, already springing up within your soul, and threatening to destroy all your joy and peace; with a fearful looking for of judgment and future indignation; with your miserable convictions, and with your bitter fears; with your gloomy forebodings, and with your knowledge of the results and consequences of sin;—do you mean to tell me that you are determined to continue? Well, if you be determined to continue, when the offended Father comes down to you in his marvellous condescension, and cries, 'Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!' then, we fear, there is but little hope; and certainly, if this state of heart continue, we cannot have much hope concerning you. It is probable that if some of you pass by many more seasons of conviction, God will say, 'He is joined to his idols; let him alone;' and you will be, in this world, left alone. You will come here, perhaps, according to your custom, but you will be left alone. I shall never have a message to you; I shall never have a prayer for you; no warning from these lips will ever reach you; you will be insensible as the very pews in which you sit, and nothing shall seem, in these ordinances, to be a voice from Heaven to your guilty and needy soul. Thus will you live until, with a seared conscience, you lie down on the bed of death, and there,

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perhaps, when it is too late, all your old fears will be awakened. You may send to your minister upon that bed of death, and he may come, but by your bedside he may be speechless, his very power to pray may depart from him, and in trying to ask mercy for you all his utterances may be choked; and you may go from that wretched dying bed to *hell*. And as you sink down into the pit, the millstone about your neck will be *the abominable thing which God hates*" (Rev. S. Martin).—C.

Vers. 17, 18.—*The apparent profitableness of sin.* This was what they asserted. And there seemed something in the assertion. All the great nations around them, and of which they knew anything, were idolaters—Assyria, Tyre, Babylon, Egypt, and the powerful Philistine, desert and other tribes. But Israel was in great trouble and humiliation. But the argument would have been valid if at the time of their fidelity they had always suffered, and if in their disobedience they had always prospered. They knew, if they would speak the truth, that the very reverse was the fact. When faithful, a thousand fell at their side, etc., but it came not nigh them. But when disobedient—though God bore with them for a while, and this forbearance they perverted into an argument for their sin, as so many do still—then it was their troubles came. But, no doubt, ungodliness did and does at times seem to be the most profitable course. This is so because—

I. If it were not so, then there could be no such thing as faith.

II. Nor could there be holiness—no love of goodness and God for their own sake.

III. The ungodly are held back by no scruples as the godly are.

IV. And they have the advantage of concentration of energy. They care only for one world; the believer cares for two, and most not for this but for the next.

V. The long-suffering of God may lead them to repentance.

VI. Therefore, let us not grudge the wicked their prosperity, nor deem their ways better than the ways of God.—C.

Ver. 17.—*Wretched reasons for a wrong resolve.* When we come to a good resolution there can always be found good reasons for it. But when we come to a bad resolve the reasons for it do not always appear so bad as they are. They can be plausibly urged and maintained, and appear very valid until they are more closely examined and the light of God's Word is brought to bear upon them. Then they appear what they really are. That Word is the Ithuriel's spear, which detects and declares what seemed to be something altogether different. Thus is it with the reasons urged here by the miserable exiles in Egypt for their persistence in their idolatry. Note—

I. THEIR RESOLVE. It was (1) that they would not hearken to the prophet of God; and (2) they would go on paying their vows, and burning their incense "unto the queen of heaven." Now, (3) this was a resolve proved to be wrong by the plain Word of God, the example of the noblest men of their race, the experience of their forefathers, and by the sorrows that had come and were yet to come upon themselves. But they urged—

II. THEIR REASONS. These were: 1. *Their vows.* As if a sinful vow could be made less sinful by keeping it; cf. Herod's vow to Herodias's daughter. Bad promises are ever better broken than kept. 2. *Custom*, which they said had in its favour: (1) *Antiquity.* Their fathers did so. Yes; some of them had; but not all, nor the best. (2) *Authority.* Their kings, princes, etc. But this, also, largely false. (3) *Unity.* They all did it. But there were a faithful few still. (4) *Universality.* It was done everywhere. Not everywhere, but, no doubt, extensively and very much, it was true, in Jerusalem, the metropolis of their land. All this was but a portion of the truth. 3. They pleaded *advantage.* They were better off when they acted thus; only trouble came when they worshipped God. No doubt sentence against their evil work was not executed speedily, and for a while their prosperity was not interrupted. Hence they perverted this forbearance of God—as men do still—into a pretext for going on in their evil way. Then when the judgments did come, and under the lash of them they gave up their idols, it was only an outward abandonment, not a genuine repentance, and such conduct did not bring back the forfeited favour of God. Hence, they said, it had been better not to have forsaken their idols at all.

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III. AND THESE WRETCHED REASONS ARE IN FORCE STILL. How many excuse and defend their idolatry of the world and self and sin on the ground of custom, of gain thereby, and of loss if they act otherwise! And the force of these so-called reasonings is great indeed with "men of this world." Where, then, can be found that reasoning which will beat back and beat down their fatal force? In this alone—the Divine Spirit acting through a consistent, believing, happy Church.—C.

Ver. 19.—*The husband's responsibility.* "Did we make her cakes to worship her . . . *without our men?*" These women pleaded that they had their husbands' sanction for what they did. It could not have been otherwise considering the subordinate position women occupied in Oriental nations. No doubt, therefore, the husbands and the male heads of families generally not only permitted, but even prompted these things. Hence it was some sort of excuse and defence for these women thus engaged in idolatrous worship. Such defence is allowed in human law. For the husband, by Christ's law as well as man's, is the head of the wife. If so, then the chief responsibility and the chief guiltiness on account of the sin of the household rest on the man at the head of it. The especial blessing of God was pronounced on Abraham because, says God, "I know him, that he will command his household after him." The anger of God came on Eli because he failed to do this. To escape such guilt, let husbands: 1. *Be in the Lord themselves.* 2. *Marry only in the Lord.* 3. *Be careful to maintain family religion.* 4. *Set themselves to seek the grace of God's regenerating Spirit for all their households.*—C.

Vers. 1—10.—*A severe lesson unlearned.* I. OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN THE LESSON. The suffering had not happened a long way off and to a people of strangers. Those who were to be taught had seen for themselves. The suffering was the very cause that prompted them to seek a home in Egypt, and even at this moment it was no great distance that separated them from the land of desolation. And so also have we opportunities, only too many, to learn from the sufferings of others. All suffering teaches something, if only we are willing to learn, and the suffering that comes through sin should have a peculiarly instructing power. Opportunity is also given, not only to learn ourselves, but to teach others. The daily newspaper, with its records of crime, folly, violent death, and lifelong disgrace, puts all who read it under a great responsibility for ordering their lives aright.

II. THE FULL EXPLANATION OF THE SUFFERING. The cause of it all is clearly stated. The unfaithfulness of a nation to their God. Even to have begun a departure from God was great wickedness, but persistency still further intensified the guilt. Other nations were faithful to their gods, though they were really no gods and had rendered no service, whereas Israel owed its growth, its position, its prosperity, its fame, to Jehovah. We do not know the origin and moulding of any other people as we do those of the people of God. We cannot think of the great suffering connected with the desolated cities of Judah without thinking also of Jehovah's long-suffering, and of the continuous prophetic means he employed to set before his people their wickedness and peril. On the other hand, we have a lesson with respect to what seems unpunished iniquity. Suffering is surely being gathered up for it. Time is being given for repentance and amendment.

III. THE LESSON IS ALTOGETHER UNLEARNED. We say "unlearned," because it effected no change. Suffering by itself cannot change. Suffering, indeed, appears to have different effects with different people, but the suffering is not really a cause. It but gives occasion to see whether men will yield to the new life and energy which comes from God. There had been a great upheaval in Judah, but so far as concerned the Jews dwelling in the land of Egypt the only change was one in the scene of their idolatries. They were the same men in Egypt as at Jerusalem.—Y.

Vers. 11—14.—*The doom on those making sure of safety in Egypt.* I. A FIXED RESOLUTION. The obstinate self-will of man brings into relief the inflexibility of the righteous judgments of God. The remnant of Judah *set their faces* to go into the land of Egypt to sojourn there. What, then, is to be expected but that Jehovah should *set his face* against them? The more self-will becomes a power in the life, the more nearly

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does it move in direct opposition to him who is the true Sovereign and Disposer of every human life. We can guess something of the thoughts of these Egypt-seekers. They say to themselves, "Henceforth we shall consult for our own safety." They speak as if the peculiar perils hitherto besetting them were the perils of one place rather than another. Perhaps even they reckoned that outside the land of Israel they were beyond Jehovah's reach. Here there is a lesson for us in our selfish aims and pursuits. All selfishness is bad, but even in selfishness a lesser badness is a degree of goodness, and it is well for a man if he gets frequently shaken in his selfishness; for then, his face not being steadily against God, he will find God looking on him encouragingly, to draw him out of his selfishness altogether.

II. A COMPLETE DESTRUCTION. Complete, that is, in the sense of general and final. There was but a remnant to begin with, and of that a very small remnant might escape. The very smallness of the remnant, however, would but magnify the completeness of the destruction. No place is secure against the visitations of God's righteous wrath. Indeed, the greater the appearance of natural security, the more manifest will be the breaking in on this security of the Divine justice. Men must be taught, even by terrible lessons, that, as there is the best kind of safety under the shadow of God's wings, so there is the worst kind of danger the further we go from God. To multiply our own defences is really to multiply our own perils.

III. A NULLIFIED PURPOSE. This remnant, not finding in Egypt the expected safety, thinks there is nothing easier than to go back again to the land of Judah. Whereas they find too late that, while departure from their own proper place is easy enough, return to it may be impossible. Opening the door to get out was one thing; opening it to get in again quite another. Seventy years was to pass before they of the Captivity should return from Babylon—indeed, it would really be another generation altogether; and should those who sought Egypt in contumacy and rebellion expect to fare better? We must be wise in time. To be wise too late gives suffering its keenest edge. So Judas brought back in vain the thirty pieces of silver, and Esau found no place of repentance though he sought it carefully with tears. This is why God is so earnest in promising wisdom and light to those who seek for them, that we may seek for them at the right time, at the beginning of the great opportunity of life, and at the beginning of every smaller opportunity.—Y.

Vers. 15—19.—*Supposed and real reasons for calamity.* I. A SUPPOSED REASON. What is the calamity? Sword and famine. Certainly a calamity to be removed and as far as possible averted for the future. And casting about to discover a reason for the calamity, the men of Judah, or rather the women, for it is they who appear most prominently in this declaration, discover that the reason is to be found in the discontinuance of their offerings to the queen of heaven. What a family matter this offering was is shown by ch. vii. 18. The women kneaded dough to make cakes to the queen of heaven. These offerings must have been very generally given up when the migration into Egypt took place, and then, on the coming of the sword and famine, what was more natural than for these women to connect the calamity with the discontinued offerings? In one thing they were quite right; there was a supernatural reason for the calamity. Wrong as they were, it was well they did not rest in any mere natural reason. They were sure that a Divine Being of some sort or other had to do with their troubles. The direction of thought is different now. When calamity comes upon people, if they connect it with God at all, they very often do so in an arbitrary kind of way, as if nothing but a mere superior will, without reason or purpose of any sort, had sent calamity to them. It is easy to pity what we call the ignorance and superstition of this crowd of women, but always we can see the errors of other times far more easily than those of our own. The causes of suffering need to be inquired for very carefully, very patiently; for wrong conclusions only bring more suffering than ever.

II. THE REAL REASON. They had forsaken Jehovah. Not that there is any necessary connection between the forsaking of Jehovah and the sword and famine. Nothing but our faith in the reality of a prophet's predictions can enable us to see this connection. There is oftentimes an utter forsaking of God, yet neither sword nor famine follow. The true and necessary result of going after something else than God is found in the consequent misery and emptiness of the life. Continually we suffer from our inability to

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see things in their right proportions. Bad as sword and famine may be, there are things infinitely worse. The fact that this multitude was debasing itself by worshipping the queen of heaven pointed to a state of things far worse than any physical suffering could be. Physical suffering may at any time be removed, if desirable, by a miracle. But that darkness of the heart producing essential idolatry, a darkness so loved and cherished, who is to remove that? Nay, the very fulness of temporal comforts may become a veil between God and the soul. The very thing which helped to deceive the people here as to the real causes of things lay in this, that at the time when they were worshipping the queen of heaven they had plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil.—Y.

Ver. 27.—*Watching over men for evil.* I. THIS WATCHING IS NEVER IRRESPECTIVE OF CONDUCT. If God ever watches over any man for evil it is because the man's conduct deserves it. It is not so necessarily with our watching. We may watch over a man for evil either from intensity of malice or intensity of selfishness. We may wish to do him ill from revenge or because his prosperity seems to mean our adversity. A word announcing watch over men for evil is a very serious word to fall even from Divine lips; and while God may speak it, perhaps we ought never to speak it. But at the same time, we cannot help watching over men for evil, and what we need especially to guard ourselves against is the doing of this from wrong motives. We must follow in the footsteps of God himself. When we censure others, or oppose them, or make them suffer in any way, let it be clear to ourselves and as far as possible clear to the world that their conduct has demanded it.

II. EVIL CONDUCT IS NEVER SEPARATED FROM SUCH WATCHING. God says that he is watching in this particular instance, but we know that he watches for evil against all evil-doers. We speak of evil-doing as being invariably followed by suffering, but this is only one way of putting the matter. We may also say that when suffering follows our wickedness it is the proof that God is watching for evil over the evil-doer. And in this matter we need zealously and boldly to do as God does, though, of course, we must do it according to the measure of human limits and infirmity. When any one is engaged with determination in any evil pursuit, it must be ours to show that we are by no means indifferent. God's watching over wicked men for evil is often done through the eyes of his own people; for if we have the Spirit of God in us there will be something of Divine discernment.

III. A CONNECTED TRUTH THAT NEEDS TO BE CONSIDERED AT THE SAME TIME. If God watches over the wicked for evil and not for good, it is equally true that he watches over the righteous for good and not for evil. Not one life, going on patiently and bravely in uprightness, is unobserved by him. Whatever the appearances may be, the abiding realities of life are against the wicked and for the righteous.—Y.

Ver. 28.—*Human and Divine confidence.* I. IN WHAT THEY ARE ALIKE. 1. *In the assurance with which they are expressed.* Here are men, in their worldly wisdom, perfectly certain that the course they have adopted will turn out right. It is always important to notice the assured unquestioning spirit in which men will set out on their enterprises. They do not seem to see the failures, disgraces, and humiliations of others; such overwhelming troubles are not to come nigh them. And all this is great testimony to the use of faith to men. God means men to be confident. The confidence which he ever expresses himself is meant to find a correspondent confidence in us. We need never be dubious in matters of a spiritual kind, however dubious we have to be as to certain external results. If we only act in the right, divinely ordained way, then we can continually be confident that all will come right. 2. *In the time of waiting needful to justify the confidence.* God speaks words, the truth and profound significance of which it may take not merely generations but even millenniums to make manifest to the whole world. Everything immediately apparent to the outward eye may contradict what he says. And something of his own wisdom and insight into the future he gives to men of the right spirit, so that they may work for results which are to be developed through long periods. He makes it possible for men to go on believing, hopeful and patient through all discouragements, and even to die in the faith that what they have sown others will reap. Thus faith which God makes to stand in the beginning

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he strengthens and establishes even to the end. And that faith which makes men themselves to utter confident dogmatic words will not be shaken all at once. Time is to try all things—the wisdom of the wise and the folly of the fools, the result of that which is sown to the Spirit and that which is sown to the flesh.

II. IN WHAT THEY DIFFER. In respect of real and deep insight into the future. The man who is confident in worldly wisdom is simply confident in the doctrine of chances. His chance of stability and success is equally good with that of others. Some must fail, but some must succeed. But God would have us ever to understand that success of this sort is only a deferred failure. If men could only see far enough, success and honour and safety would be utterly transmuted into failure, disgrace, and ruin. But God's confidence is based on certain and complete knowledge. The end of all unsettlement and change must be something stable and continuous, and when God sees men reckoning themselves on a true foundation, which after all is miserably brief and frail, he can only assert the truth. If men will not believe, the only thing remaining is to wait. The utter downfall of the Jewish nation from such a height to such a depth was predicted even in the days of their outward glory. The Word of God stands because he can discern the certain exhaustion of purely human resources even when those resources show themselves in exuberant exercise and impressive achievement.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XLV.

PROMISE TO BARUCH.

Ver. 1.—**These words**; *i.e.* the revelations which Baruch had committed (or was committing) to writing.

Ver. 3.—**Hath added grief to my sorrow.** Baruch felt "sorrow" or "pain" at the sinfulness of the people; "grief" or "anxiety" was added by Jeremiah's announcement of the judgment. **I fainted in my sighing**; rather, *I am weary with my sighing*; comp. Ps. vi. 7 (Authorized Version, 6).

Ver. 4.—**That which I have built** (comp. ch. i. 10 and parallel passages). **Even this whole land**; rather, *and that is the whole earth.*

Ver. 5.—**Seekest thou great things**, etc.? All around is passing through a sore crisis, and canst thou expect a better lot? It is no time for personal ambition, when the very foundations of the state are crumbling. **In all places whither thou goest.** This seems to indicate that Baruch's time of exile would be a restless one; it would nowhere be safe for him to take up a settled habitation.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*The grief of one soul, and its consolation.* This chapter is devoted to one man. Among the large prophecies concerning whole nations, room is found for a prophecy to a single individual. The Bible is at once universal and individualistic in character. Its narratives alternate history with biography. God cares for the whole world, and truth is large as the universe; yet God does not forget one soul in its private distress, and truth has special applications to special cases.

I. THE GRIEF. Baruch had a double distress—grief added to sorrow. 1. *The first sorrow.* Probably this arose from a consideration of the wretched condition of the nation in its vice and decay. It is right and natural that good men should feel deep concern at the state of their country. The Christian should have the spirit of him who "when he beheld the city, wept over it." Moreover, if we see much of the wickedness of the world, we should not be satisfied with steadily condemning it, nor with congratulating ourselves on our own superior goodness. The sight should fill us with sorrow. They who go thus astray are our own brethren. And is not there much of the same sin in all of us? Often the wickedness which shocks us in others is only the full development of the very sin that lurks in our own hearts. 2. *The added grief.* (1) This came from the *prophecy.* Baruch was commissioned to write and read. His privileged position, so near to the fountain of inspiration, only deepened his distress. High spiritual privilege may bring only sadness in this world's experience. Increase of knowledge may be increase of sorrow. Revelation is sometimes a cause of distress. In the present

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case the prophecy was a declaration of the approaching doom of Jerusalem. We should contemplate the punishment of the impenitent with profound grief. Revengeful, triumphant, or self-complacent feelings in regard to this terrible subject are quite unchristian. (2) Baruch had *personal grounds* for his distress. In the approaching overthrow of his nation all his cherished hopes of personal ambition were shattered. The most sanguine too often suffer the bitterest disappointments. (3) *Jeremiah's grief* would add to that of Baruch. Sorrow is contagious. He who is much with "the Man of sorrows" will be likely to feel strange grief in contemplating the evil of the world. Baruch could find no rest in his grief. The greatest weariness is not the result of hard work; it comes from distress of heart. It is trouble, not work, that breaks down the strong life to premature old age. The blessedness of the heavenly rest is that it is rest from sorrow as well as from toil.

II. THE CONSOLATION. Jeremiah has a prophecy for Baruch. God speaks to individual souls. The preacher must be preached to. Has not he who would save others a soul of his own to be saved? How sad that any preacher should declare the Divine message to the people, but hear no voice speaking peace to his own troubled soul! If he were as faithful as Baruch, he might expect, like Baruch, to receive a Divine consolation. Note the characteristics of this consolation. It did not deny the cause of grief. Much comfort is unreal and false in trying to do this. The consolation for Baruch consisted chiefly in furnishing him with advice regarding his views of God's action and his own aims in life. 1. *A lesson of acquiescence in the Divine will.* God is acting within his rights. It is vain to rebel. Peace is found in submission. 2. *A rebuke to ambition.* Self-seeking brings distress. As we live out of self we gain Divine peace. 3. *A promise of safety.* After the lessons intended to lead Baruch into a right mood, God promises him his life—only this, but this is much for a humble man who knows he does not deserve it, and a good man who will devote it to God's service.

Ver. 4.—*Divine destruction.* I. GOD CAN DESTROY HIS OWN WORK. What he made he can unmake. People dogmatize about the indestructibility of matter, of atoms, of souls. How do we know they are indestructible? Is God's omnipotence limited by the properties of his own works? But apart from all metaphysics, the complex world, being *constructed*, is plainly subject to *destruction*. It is monstrous to think the universe is a huge Frankenstein, able to escape from the power of its Maker.

II. GOD HAS A RIGHT TO DESTROY HIS OWN WORK. There is no property so clearly belonging to a person as the work of his own hands. All things that exist were made by God, and all belong to him. What he gave us he has a right to withdraw. His gifts are loans, talents to be used for a season and then returned. No creature has a right to its own life before God. He freely gave it; he may withdraw it. Much less have we sinful creatures any such right.

III. GOD WILL NOT DESTROY HIS OWN WORK WITHOUT GOOD REASON. A power is not necessarily always put forth nor a right in perpetual exercise. God does not act capriciously nor cruelly. He is the Creator rather than the Destroyer. He delights in creating because he loves his creatures. He takes no pleasure in destroying, but will only do it under urgent necessity.

IV. NEVERTHELESS THERE ARE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH GOD WILL DESTROY HIS OWN WORK. All things were good when they came from their Maker's hands. But some have been corrupted. When a thing is hopelessly corrupt there is no reason for preserving it and much for destroying it. See this in earthly experience—the Flood, the destruction of Jerusalem, and in greater judgments—the wages of sin, death, and the final destruction of the world. Therefore let us not presume that any work or institution is eternal because it was established by the eternal God, that any possession of ours must be permanent because it came from him, or that our own life is safe because God breathed it into us.

Ver. 5.—*Self-seeking.* Self-seeking is treated in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, as both wrong and not really profitable to the self-seeker, although it seems to be prompted by natural instincts and supported by good reasons. Let us consider the grounds of these representations.

I. WHY SELF-SEEKING IS WRONG. God does not require absolute altruism; we are

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only commanded to love our neighbours *as* ourselves. Natural self-regarding instincts created by God can surely be innocently exercised. It cannot be necessary for all efforts of men to rise in social position, etc., to be condemned. What, then is the self-seeking which is blameworthy? 1. That which offends against *justice* by seeking selfish gain at the expense of others. What frightful injustice ambition must answer for, in liberty destroyed, lives sacrificed, confusion and misery sown broadcast! 2. That which offends against *charity* by disregarding the good of others. In the spirit of Cain it cries, "Am I my brother's keeper?" So long as it attains its own ends, it will not lift a finger to move another man's burden. But Christ teaches us that it is not enough that we do not injure others, we must also actively help them; it is not enough that we do not steal, we must go further and "give to him that asketh." 3. That which offends against *duty* by sacrificing the vocation of life to private gain. We are not free to live to ourselves, because we are not our own masters. We are called to God's service. Our duty is to serve God, not self, so that whatsoever we do may be done "unto the Lord." Self-seeking is rebellion against our Lord and Master. In times of *public distress* self-seeking is peculiarly odious. Such were the times in which Baruch lived. Then there are loud calls of duty and noble tasks to be done. The general grief makes the thought of one's own pleasure and profit out of place. To use that distress as a ladder by which to rise to greatness is indeed despicable.

II. WHY SELF-SEEKING IS NOT PROFITABLE. In a worldly sense and for a time it may be, but not really and ultimately. Even in the lower human relations, how often do the seeds of ambition bring a harvest of anxiety! The self-seeker reaches the climax of his endeavours, his most brilliant dream is realized, he is a king—and he wears a hidden coat of mail, hides himself in a fortress-castle, has not the liberty of his meanest subject, is driven near to madness by the fear of assassination.

> "He who ascends to mountain-tops shall find
> The loftiest peaks most wrapped in clouds and snow;
> He who surpasses or subdues mankind
> Must look down on the hate of those below."

When extreme greatness and extreme disappointment are neither realized, lesser self-seeking brings its corresponding trouble. It narrows the heart and destroys the purest and best delights—the joys of human sympathy. Christ shows to us deeper grounds for regarding it as a vain pursuit. "The first shall be last, and the last first." The reason he gives is that "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall save it." Only in proportion as we live out of self can we enjoy a life worth living; only then, indeed, do we truly live at all. By trying to make ourselves great, though we may reach a high external position, we fall to a low internal condition—we become mean and small; while in forgetting self and sacrificing self for God and for mankind we become unconsciously great.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—*Baruch's message; or, God's consideration for his servant.* It is not always well to know more than others. Future things are for the most part mercifully hidden from us. The prophecies of God's kingdom in the world, as they awaken new hopes, also occasion new anxieties; and the latter will be the greater in proportion to our failure to comprehend and sympathize with the Divine purpose. Baruch was not in the same relation of spiritual sympathy and self-effacement with relation to the Word as Jeremiah was; he did not share the same moral elevation, and therefore his perplexities. In reward of his faithful, self-denying work as amanuensis to the prophet, a special communication is made to him with reference to his state of mind on hearing the threatenings of God against Israel and the nations.

I. TO RECEIVE SUCH A COMMUNICATION WAS A DISTINGUISHED HONOUR. In identifying his name with the book he wrote it immortalized him. His work was a comparatively humble one, but it required its own virtues, and these are recognized. Nothing done for God in a right spirit is forgotten by him. Amidst imperial and world-wide changes the interests of his servants are ever watched over with special care. When we see the

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Sovereign Disposer of events, when empires are as small dust in his balance, arranging for the welfare of a single individual, merely because of help given to one of his prophets, shall we not acknowledge how precious in his eyes is even the least of his servants? They are children of the great King.

II. IT MINISTERED TO HIS PERSONAL COMFORT AND PEACE OF MIND. The anxiety and fear which weighed upon Baruch are thereby dissipated. God loves to see his children cheerful and in sympathy with his will. It is just from the "sorrow of the world that worketh death," he seeks to deliver us. The work of Baruch would be easier and less oppressive when he was assured that his own safety would be secured. But how poor is this promise compared with the "life and immortality brought to light in the gospel"! The children of promise are not only delivered from the sorrows and disappointments of this present evil world, but made sharers in the final triumphs of redemptive love.

III. IT CORRECTED A SPIRITUAL FAULT. 1. *The caution.* "And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not." Earthly ambition has often crept into the heart of God's servants. It is not consistent with faithful, single-eyed service. They that would further the kingdom of God in the world must seek it first. Baruch was reminded that this is not our rest. And when the powers of the world were being shaken was no time for self-advancement. His sighs were not pure. He mourned over opportunities lost, not of laying up treasure in heaven, but of accumulating it on earth. 2. *The promise.* "Thy life will I give unto thee for a prey." It seems poor, compared with his hopes. He perhaps anticipated a slight rebuke and chastisement of Israel, a few changes and adjustments, and the carrying on of the Divine purposes to a speedy issue. This illusion is gently but firmly checked. The world has a severer ordeal to pass through ere the ancient offence can be expiated, and the arena cleared for the Divine future. His hopes are, therefore, not wholly destroyed, but transferred. He will be spared to see the things beyond, and meanwhile it will be his privilege to help on that better time. Happy for him if, thus corrected, he attains to a diviner calm of spirit and a more thorough acceptance of the Divine terms and conditions. He too was but a sinner, whose deliverance was in itself a great and undeserved mercy (cf. Matt. xxiv.).—M.

Vers. 1—5.—*Baruch; or, the young recruit reheartened.* Baruch reminds of Mark (Acts xiii. 13). Both were good and faithful men; both became discouraged; both were reheartened; both found profitable to the ministry and true to the end. Now, as we look on this Divine reheartening of Baruch, we are taught much—

I. CONCERNING GOD. 1. We see *his grace.* He does not overlook or forget his servants. He notes their distresses and devises means for their relief. "Like as a father pitieth," etc. 2. We see *his methods* with those who are as Baruch was. (1) Though animated by love, they were severe rather than soothing; stern rather than gentle and consolatory. We have many parallels to this. Cf. ch. xii., "If thou hast run with the footmen," etc. How stern the dealing of God with Moses! No entreaty could procure the alteration of the sentence of exclusion from Canaan that had gone out against him. See also our Lord's message to John the Baptist in prison: "Go, tell John," etc. No gentle message of sympathy, but rather of rebuke for his failure of faith. So with Paul's thorn in the flesh, the Lord would not remove it. In all these cases there is rather the sharp, bracing, rousing summons to duty than words of soothing pity and tenderness. Far more like Paul's dealing with the recreant Mark—he virtually cashiered him—than that of Barnabas, who, Son of Consolation that he was, was all for comforting him and dealing gently with him. (2) God tells him that he has heard his complainings. When we talk to ourselves, we often forget that every word is audible to God. The people about our Lord were often talking to themselves concerning him, and, though they said nothing out loud, we constantly read how "Jesus *answered* and said," showing that he had heard all they said. (3) He gives him to understand that his purpose is not to be set aside because of his complainings. "The Lord saith thus." If we cannot bring our circumstances to our mind, our wisdom is to bring our mind to our circumstances. Baruch was shown that he must do this. (4) He implies that a seeking after "high things" for himself had much to do with his complaining. He was of great ability, of noble lineage (ch. li. 59; Josephus, 'Ant.,' x. vi. 2; ix. 1), the grandson of Maasiah (2 Chron. xxxiv. 8), and this may well have animated

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him with hopes of high office in the state, such as his brother had held; or his nearness to Jeremiah may have led him to believe that he should be the prophet's successor. (5) He promises him that his life shall be spared, though with much difficulty—"given to him as a prey." We cannot tell what afterwards became of him. Tradition varies. There was not much comfort in all this, but rather a "What doest thou here, Elijah?" (1 Kings xix.). 3. *His motives.* The leaders of an army must not be weaklings. Those who have stern work to do must themselves be stern. Luther, not Erasmus, must head the Reformation movement. Hence God disciplines his most trusted servants by very severe methods. Even our Lord, "He learned obedience by the things that he suffered;" "He was made perfect through sufferings." 4. *His success.* That which he purposes is ever done. Baruch here, as Mark afterwards, was reheartened and did good service again.

II. CONCERNING THE PROPHETIC WORK. Demands self-denial, involves much suffering, and has much sorrow in it. No wonder that in ancient days men shrank from the pastoral office. "Nolo episcopari" meant something then. Are any thinking of it? Count the cost. Are any in it? Let them, as they need, seek daily strength from God.

"Chief Shepherd of thy chosen sheep,
From sin and death set free,
May every under-shepherd keep
His eye intent on thee."

Let those not so charged of the Lord pray for those that are.

III. CONCERNING YOUNG SOLDIERS OF JESUS CHRIST. 1. There is much that is delightful in them. Their ardour, their zeal, their affection. Elisha to Elijah, Timotheus to Paul, so here Baruch to Jeremiah. 2. But they are apt to be discouraged and desponding. They need enduring power. Melancthon thought he should soon convert men to the truth. But Luther tells how the old Adam was soon found to be too hard for the young Melancthon. 3. Let them submit cheerfully to the methods of discipline God has appointed for them, and be on their guard against all self-seeking ambition. 4. And they are to remember that, though their life be given to them, it shall be "as a prey." They will have to watch, to toil, to contend, to struggle, even for that.

"The Son of God goes forth to war . . .
Who follows in his train?"

C.

Ver. 5.—*Ambition prohibited.* "Seekest thou great things," etc.? God searches the heart, and probably discovered that, lurking secretly there, there was somewhat of an unhallowed ambition. Had he been other than one of God's chosen messengers, such ambition would have been natural and reasonable (cf. former homily). God does not directly charge him with this, but sets him on self-examination. This ever the Divine method. Are we seeking great things for ourselves? If we are, God says to us, "Seek them not." And the reasons are many. Some of them are such as these—

I. We cannot tell whether they are designed for us. If they are not, they will bring us only misery; cf. David in Saul's armour. If they are, they will come without our seeking.

II. To make *ourselves* our supreme object is ever wrong, despicable, and in the end ruinous. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and *die*, give up its own life. If it do not, it abideth alone; if it do, it bringeth forth fruit. "He that loveth his life shall lose it, but he," etc. (John xii.).

III. Great things mean great responsibilities and terrible possibilities of great guilt and harm done to others and ourselves.

IV. Whilst seeking them, we let go what is more precious than them all. "Whilst I was busy here and there, lo, he was gone."

V. They tend to tie us down to earth and to fill our hearts with that love of the world which is death. "Ah! Davie, Davie," said Johnson to Garrick, as they wandered through the beautiful demesne of a great nobleman, "these are the things that make it so hard for a man to die." A similar story is told of Cardinal Richelieu,

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who caused himself, when near death, to be borne into his magnificent picture-gallery, and there is reported to have made, to one near him, a like remark.—C.

Vers. 1—5.—*Counsel and comfort for the man overcome with bad tidings.* I. CONSIDER THE EFFECT ON BARUCH'S OWN MIND OF WHAT HE HAD HAD TO WRITE. Baruch came in simply to be a scribe and transmitter. Seemingly a friend of Jeremiah, he must have been in considerable sympathy with the prophet in his purposes and predictions. Doubtless he had made himself acquainted with each prophetic utterance as it came forth from Jehovah. But he had never had them all before his mind at one time, as now became necessary, through his having to write them down. Hence we have here an illustration of how more is required than the *mere utterance* of a word of God in order to produce a deep effect from it. A man may think he understands and receives it, and yet the understanding and reception may be far from what they ought to be. Not till Jeremiah's prophecies stand before Baruch in one mass does he fully discern the trouble coming on his people. Jehovah has spoken many times, and always in the same way, against the wicked and their wickedness. And so we see how important it is to get the impression, not only of successive parts of God's words, but of that Word as a whole. Moreover, if Baruch was oppressed by the consistent mass of threatening, it is equally possible for us to be uplifted and strengthened by a consistent mass of promises and encouragements. We shall ever find in the Scriptures that which we look for and prepare ourselves to find.

II. SOME INDICATION OF BARUCH'S OWN CHARACTER. Baruch seems to have been, not exactly what we should call an ambitious man, but still one who wanted to get on in the world. Perhaps he had a position which made it reasonable for him to expect influence and authority. But what can a man of this sort look for in a state rapidly declining to its fall? Baruch had to learn all at once that he must seek for such things as God would have him seek for. Thus we see God combining a lesson for the individual with the message for the nation. Baruch could hardly have been the only man competent to act as a scribe, but God, in taking him, took one who needed correction, needed to have his purposes turned into a more submissive way and a less self-seeking one.

III. TEMPORAL BLESSINGS MUST DEPEND UPON CIRCUMSTANCES. There had been times in the Jewish state when Baruch might have been a very useful man in some high position. But every man must accept the conditions of the time in which he lives. At one time the great temporal blessings may be those of attainment, at another those of escape. And so, to some extent, it is in spiritual things. There are times when what Christ does for us puts on the aspect of salvation; we are glad because of the great evils from which we are delivered. There are other times when we are not contented with merely thinking of deliverance; we want something positive—growth, fruitfulness, perfection. Then we are seeking great things spiritually—things which are always to be sought. And we may add they are always to be found, however adverse temporal conditions may be.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XLVI.

This chapter, the first of a series, consists of two prophecies united, though it is probable enough that the latter was intended to supplement the former, for vers. 2—12 are clearly incomplete (from the point of view of this group of prophecies) without a distinct and unmistakable prediction of the conquest of Egypt. The earlier prophecy is, in fact, not itself a prediction, but a triumphal ode, analogous to such as we find in the Books of Isaiah and Ezekiel. It falls into three stanzas: (1) vers. 3—6; (2) vers. 7—9; (3) vers. 10—12. In the first two the great event is described with poetical imagery; in the third, its cause is declared, and the irremediable completeness of its effects. The point of time assumed is immediately before the battle of Carchemish. The Egyptian army has taken up its position by the Euphrates, and Jeremiah, from his prophetic watch-tower, recognizes the importance of the step. He knows that a collision of the two great powers is

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inevitable, and that the fortunes of *his* world will be decided by the result. It is, in short, a "day of Jehovah" which he sees before him. As a prophet, he cannot doubt what the issue will be. He falls into a lyrically descriptive mood, and portrays the picture which unrolls itself before his imagination.

Ver. 1.—**Against the Gentiles**; rather, *concerning the nations* (as distinguished from Israel). This heading relates to all the seven prophecies in ch. xlvi.—xlix. 33.

Ver. 2.—**Against Egypt, against the army**; rather, *concerning Egypt, concerning the army*. **Pharaoh-necho.** Necho II., a member of the twenty-sixth Egyptian dynasty, son of Psametik I. (Psammetichus), who had for a time revived the declining power of Egypt. Herodotus (ii. 158) credits him with being the first to construct a canal to the Red Sea, which seems an exaggeration (see Sir Gardner Wilkinson's note *ap.* Rawlinson), also (iv. 42) with having caused the circumnavigation of Africa, after which the Phœnician seamen brought back the startling news that they had had the sun upon their right hand. This energetic monarch noticed the decline of Assyria, and, at the battle of Megiddo (Herodotus, ii. 159, wrongly says Magdolus or Migdol), reattached Judah to the Egyptian empire. Four years later, at the battle of Carchemish, he himself sustained a crushing defeat at the hands of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (2 Chron. xxxv. 20). **Carchemish.** This was the great emporium of Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine. Its true site was discovered by Mr. George Smith, in his last fatal journey, to be at Jerâbîs or Jirbâs, on the right bank of the Euphrates. It was anciently a city of the Kheta (equivalent to Khittim, "Hittites"), but passed to the Assyrians, under Sargon, under whom it attained the highest commercial prosperity, especially after the overthrow of Tyre by Sennacherib. The "mana," or *mina*, "of Gargamis" is constantly referred to as a standard weight in the commercial cuneiform inscriptions. **In the fourth year**, etc. Marcus Niebuhr wishes to put a stop before these words, so as to make them a definition of the date of the prophecy. He thinks the date of the battle of Carchemish was the third and not the fourth year of Jehoiakim. This view, however, is very uncertain (see Keil), and it is exegetically very unnatural to detach the closing words of ver. 2 from those which precede. The obvious inference, moreover, from the prophecy (vers. 2—12) is that it was written at or about the time of the battle; a special date for the prophecy did not require to be given. Should Niebuhr's chronological combinations, however, turn out to be correct, the mistake would probably not be that of Jeremiah, nor of his scribe, but of his editor, who may easily have fallen into error in the mere minutiæ of chronology.

Ver. 3.—**Order ye**, etc. The leaders of the Egyptians are heard summoning their men to make ready their armour, and set themselves in array (comp. ver. 9). The **buckler** (Hebrew, *māgēn*) is the small shield; the **shield** (Hebrew, *çinnāh*) is the large one (*scutum*), which covered the whole body (comp. 2 Chron. ix. 15, 16).

Ver. 4.—**Harness the horses**; viz. to the war-chariots, for which Egypt was famous (comp. Exod. xiv. 6, 9; 1 Kings x. 28, 29; Isa. xxxi. 1). **Get up, ye horsemen.** An equally possible rendering, and one which better suits the parallelism, is, "mount the chargers." **Put on the brigandines.** "Brigandine" is an archaic word (Hakluyt's 'Voyages'), meaning the armour of a "brigand" or member of a "brigade," or "troop" (comp. Italian, *brigata*). The Hebrew word means "coats of mail."

Ver. 5.—That so well-equipped an army should flee seems incredible. Hence the astonished question, **Wherefore have I seen**, etc.? literally, *Why do I see* (*that*) *they* (*are*) *dismayed, turning back?* **And look not back.** With the object of rallying the scattered forces. **For fear was round about.** It is a pity that the Authorized Version has not kept one uniform rendering for this favourite expression of Jeremiah. In ch. vi. 25 (see note) it is translated, "fear is on every side" (Hebrew, *māgōr missābîb*).

Ver. 6.—**Let not the swift flee away.** A strong way of expressing that even the swiftest *cannot* expect to flee, just as, in Isa. ii. 9, "forgive them not" means "thou canst not forgive them." Nothing seems to have struck the Jews so much as the unparalleled swiftness of the Chaldean warriors (Hab. i. 6, 8; ch. iv. 13). **They shall stumble**; literally, *they have stumbled*; it is most probably the prophetic perfect ("they shall certainly fall"), though Ewald denies this, and consequently maintains that the prophecy was written *after* the battle of Carchemish. **Toward the north**; *i.e.* "in the northern region," or, more loosely, "in the north" (comp. ver. 10). Carchemish was, of course, far to the north of Jerusalem.

Ver. 7.—**Who is this**, etc.? "Once more surprise at the [same] phenomenon recurs, and in a stronger form; a monstrous, devastating river appears to roll itself wildly along, overwhelming all countries: who is it? It is Egypt, which is now threatening to overrun the earth and to lay everything waste, whose various nationalities are advancing fully equipped" (Ewald). **As a flood**; rather, *as the Nile* (*y'ōr*, a word of Egyptian affinities, and only once used of another river than the Nile, Dan. xii. 5, 6, 7).

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The naturalness of the figure in this context needs no exhibiting. It reminds us of Isa. viii. 7, 8, where the Assyrian army is compared to the Euphrates. **Are moved as the rivers**; rather, *toss themselves as the rivers*. By the "rivers" the prophet means the branches of the Nile, which are described by the same word in Isa. xix. 8; Exod. vii. 19.

Ver. 8.—**Egypt riseth up**, etc. The answer to the question in ver. 7. **The city**. The article is not expressed; and there can be no doubt that the word is used collectively of cities in general (comp. ch. xlvii. 2).

Ver. 9.—A call to the army, particularizing its two grand divisions, viz. the warriors in chariots, and the light and heavy armed infantry. M. Pierret, of the Egyptian Museum at the Louvre, writes thus: "The army was composed (1) of infantry equipped with a cuirass, a buckler, a pike or an axe, and a sword; they manœuvred to the sound of the drum and the trumpet; (2) of light troops (archers, slingers, and other soldiers carrying the axe or the tomahawk); (3) warriors in chariots. Cavalry, properly so called, was not employed. . . . The Egyptians also enlisted auxiliaries, such as Mashawash, a tribe of Libyans, who, after the defeat of a confederation of northern peoples hostile to Menephtah, into which they had entered, refused to leave Egypt, and entered the Egyptian army; the Kahakas, another Libyan tribe; the Shardanas (Sardinians); the Madjaiu, who, after having been in war with the Egyptians under the twelfth dynasty, enrolled themselves under the standard of their conquerors, and constituted a sort of gendarmerie," etc. ('Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Égyptienne,' pp. 64, 65). Among the mercenaries mentioned by Jeremiah, the Ludim deserve special mention. They are generally supposed to be a North African people (and so Ezek. xxx. 5). Professor Sayce, however, thinks they may be the Lydian soldiers by whose help Psammetichus made Egypt independent of Assyria, and his successors maintained their power (Cheyne's 'Prophecies of Isaiah,' ii. 287). **Come up, ye horses**; rather, *bound* (or, *prance*), *ye horses*. The verb is literally *go up*, and seems to be used in the same sense, only in the Hiphil or causative conjugation, in Nah. iii. 3 (which should begin, "Horsemen making (their horses) to rear"). Ewald and others render, "Mount the horses," the phrase being substantially the same as in ver. 4 (see above). But the parallelism here is opposed to this; and the prophet has evidently been a reader of the prophecy of Nahum, as the very next clause shows. **Rage, ye chariots**; rather, *rush madly, ye chariots* (alluding to Nah. ii. 5). **The Ethiopians**; Hebrew, *Cush*; often mentioned in connection with Egypt. The whole Nile valley, as far as Abyssinia, had been reduced to an Egyptian province. At last Cush had its turn of revenge, and an Ethiopian dynasty reigned in the palaces of Thebes (B.C. 725—665). **The Libyans**; Hebrew, *Put* (which occurs in combination with Lud, as here with Ludim, in Ezek. xxvii. 10; xxx. 5). This appears to be the Egyptian Put (nasalized into Punt), *i.e.* the Somali country on the east coast of Africa, opposite to Arabia (Brugsch).

Ver. 10.—The contrast. *And yet that day is (the day) of the Lord, Jehovah Sabâoth* (the rendering of the Authorized Version, **For this is the day**, etc., is clearly a mistake). The "day of Jehovah" is an expression so familiar to us that we are in danger of losing a part of its sublime meaning. It is, in brief, "that crisis in the history of the world when Jehovah will interpose to rectify the evils of the present, bringing joy and glory to the humble believer, and misery and shame to the proud and disobedient. . . . This great crisis is called a day, in antithesis to the ages of the Divine long-suffering: it is *Jehovah's* day, because, without a special Divine interposition, there would be no issue out of the perplexities and miseries of human life." We may say, with equal truth, that there are many "days of the Lord," and that there is only one. Every great revolution is a fresh stage in the great judgment-day; "*die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht*" (Schiller). The *loci classici* for the expression in the prophets are Amos v. 18, 20; Zeph. i. 7, 14; Joel ii. 1, 11; Isa. ii. 12; xiii. 6, 9 (in Isa. ii. 12, the phraseology closely resembles that of our passage—"for there is a day unto Jehovah Sabâoth;" Jehovah, that is, hath it in readiness in the supersensible world, where there is no time, and where all God's purposes have an ideal, but no less real existence. We might, in fact, render our passage, "but that day (is the day that belongeth) unto the Lord," etc.). **The Lord** here, as generally elsewhere, is that expressive form which intimates the universal lordship of the God who has revealed himself to Israel. **The sword**. A comparison with Isa. xxxiv. 6 suggests that it is "the sword of the Lord" which is meant—a symbolic phrase for the Divine vengeance, which meets us again in ch. xii. 12; xlvii. 6; Deut. xxxii. 41, 42; Judg. vii. 20 (comp. Josh. v. 13); Isa. xxvii. 1; xxxi. 8; xxxiv. 5, 6; lxvi. 16; Zech. xiii. 7. If Jehovah can be spoken of as having an Arm, a Hand, and a Bow, why not also as having a sword? Both expressions represent the self-revealing side of the Divine nature, and are not merely poetical ornaments, but correspond to awful objective realities. Divine

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vengeance exists, and must exercise itself on all who oppose the Divine will. **Hath a sacrifice.** The same figurative expression occurs in Isa. xxxiv. 6, and, developed at considerable length, in Ezek. xxxix. 17—20, where the slaughtered foes are described as fatted beasts, rams, lambs, he-goats, bullocks—animals employed in the Jewish sacrifices. This, then, is the purpose for which this immense host "rolls up from Africa"—it is that it may fall by the Euphrates, at once as a proof of God's justice, and as a warning to transgressors.

Ver. 11.—**Go up into Gilead** (see on ch. viii. 22). **In vain shalt thou use,** etc.; rather, *in vain hast thou used,* etc.; a much more vigorous, pictorial expression. **Thou shalt not be cured.** The literal rendering is more forcible, *there is no plaster for thee;* i.e. no bandage will avail to heal the wound (comp. ch. xxx. 13).

Ver. 12.—**Hath filled the land;** rather, *the earth,* corresponding to "the nations."

Ver. 13.—**The word,** etc. This verse is the heading of a new prophecy, which, however, for the reason already mentioned (see introduction to this chapter), is not to be regarded as entirely independent of the preceding prophecy, but rather as a supplement (just as Isa. xviii., though not in strict sequence to xvii. 12—14, is yet a supplement to it). The heading does not expressly state when the prophecy was written, but from the mention of Nebuchadnezzar, both in the heading and in the prophecy itself, we may assume a date subsequent to the battle of Carchemish, for the earlier prophecies contain no reference to that redoubtable name. An important question now arises—When did Nebuchadnezzar invade and conquer Egypt? and what would be the consequences of admitting that a Babylonian subjugation of that country is historically not proven? There can be no doubt that Jeremiah did hold out such a prospect; for he not only says so here, but also in ch. xliii. 8—13 and xliv. 30. In the latter prophecy it is not Necho, but Hophra, in whose reign the blow is to fall. But no monumental evidence has as yet been found [see, however, postscript to this note] of anything approaching to an invasion of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar; nor do the accounts of Herodotus (ii. 159, etc.) at all supply the deficiency (on this, however, see further at end of note). It is true that Josephus quotes passages from Berosus, the Babylonian historian, to the effect that Nabopolassar had set a Chaldean governor over Egypt, but that this governor had revolted, and that Nabopolassar's son, Nebuchadnezzar, crushed the rebellion and incorporated Egypt into his empire. But these events happened, according to the quotation from Berosus, partly before, partly immediately after, the death of Nabopolassar, and was consequently earlier than the prophecy in this chapter. Another fact of importance must be mentioned in this connection, viz. that Ezekiel repeats the announcement of the Babylonian conquest of Egypt, of which he speaks as if it were to happen at the close of the thirteen years of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre (Ezek. xxix. 17—21). Thus there is a gradual increase in the definiteness of the announcement. Looking at our chapter by itself, we might suppose that the conquest was to take place soon after the decisive battle at Carchemish. After the murder of Gedaliah, when Jeremiah had removed to Egypt, we find him foretelling the sore punishment of Egypt in greater detail, and the name of Hophra (instead of Necho) is introduced as that of the deposed king. Finally, Ezekiel (as we have seen) specifies a definite time. Now, it is true that our knowledge of this period is somewhat incomplete. We have not the direct historical proof that could be wished as to the result of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre, though it would be fastidious to scruple at the evidence which satisfied so cool a judgment as that of George Grote. The great historian denies, however, that Tyre at this time suffered such a terrific desolation as is suggested by a literal interpretation of Ezek. xxvi., and continues in these remarkable terms: "Still less can it be believed that that king conquered Egypt and Libya, as Megasthenes, and even Berosus so far as Egypt is concerned, would have us believe—the argument of Larcher, 'Ad Herodot.,' ii. 168, is anything but satisfactory. The defeat of the Egyptian king at Carchemish, and the stripping him of his foreign possessions in Judæa and Syria, have been exaggerated into a conquest of Egypt itself" ('Hist. of Greece,' vol. iii. p. 445, note 1). Supposing Mr. Grote's view of the facts of the siege of Tyre to be correct, it is clear that the prophet's reproduction of the Divine revelation made to him was defective; that it presents traces of a stronger human element than we are accustomed to admit. Tyre had to suffer a fall; but the fall was not as yet to be so complete a one as Ezekiel, reasoning upon his revelation, supposed. It is equally possible that Jeremiah and Ezekiel, reasoning upon the revelation of the inevitable fall of Egypt, mistook the time when, in its fulness, the Divine judgment was to take place. The case may, perhaps, turn out to be analogous to that of an apparently but not really unfulfilled prophecy in Isa. xliii. 3. A literal interpretation of that passage would give the conquest of Egypt to Cyrus; as a matter of

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fact, we know that it was Cambyses, and not Cyrus, who fulfilled the prophecy. It would not be surprising if we should have to admit that it was Cambyses, and not any earlier monarch, who fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah. Certain great principles of God's moral government had to be affirmed; it was of no moment whatever whether Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, or Cambyses was the instrument of their affirmation. A parallel from Isaiah may again be adduced. The shameful captivity of Egypt, and perhaps Ethiopia, which Isaiah foresaw in the time of Sargon (Isa. xx. 3), was not realized in fact until Esar-haddon despoiled Tirhakah, King of Egypt and Ethiopia, of the whole of Upper Egypt. There are cases in which a literal fulfilment of prophecy may be abandoned without detriment to Divine revelation, and this seems to be one of them. And yet we must always remember that even the letter of the prophecy may some day turn out to be more nearly in harmony with facts than we have supposed, our knowledge of this period being in several respects so very imperfect. It has been acutely pointed out that the oracle given to Necho (Herod., ii. 158), "that he was labouring for the barbarian," seems to imply a current expectation of an invasion of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar, and that the gradual conquest by that king of one neighbouring country after another suggests that the invasion of Egypt was at any rate the object at which he aimed. The silence of Herodotus as to a Chaldean invasion is, perhaps, not very important. He does not mention Necho's defeat by Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish, nor does he ever refer to the victories over Egypt of any King of Assyria.

POSTSCRIPT.—The above note is left precisely as it was written, February, 1881, in ignorance of Wiedemann's then recent discovery of a contemporary hieroglyphic inscription which, as the report of the German Oriental Society expresses it, "ratifies the *hitherto universally doubted* fact of an invasion of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar." The hieroglyphic narrative is supplemented and confirmed by two cuneiform records, and the combined results are as follows. In the thirty-seventh year of his reign, Hophra or Apries being King of Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar undertook an expedition against Egypt, and penetrated as far as the island of Elephantine, and damaged the temple of Chnum, which stood there. His army could not, however, pass the cataracts. At Syene the Egyptian troops, under Neshor, met and repelled the invaders. Two years later, however, the Babylonians came again, were victorious over the Egyptian host under Amasis, and compelled the whole land to pay tribute. Thus we have a remarkable confirmation of Ezekiel's prophecy that Egypt should be "waste and desolate from Migdol unto Syene, even unto the border of Ethiopia" (Ezek. xxix. 10). It should be mentioned that the Babylonians are not described in the hieroglyphics by their proper name, but as "the Syrians (?), the peoples of the north, the Asiatics;" it is from a terra-cotta cuneiform tablet that we learn that, in Nebuchadnezzar's thirty-seventh year (B.C. 568–7), a war arose between him and the King of Egypt, which ended with the payment of tribute to the former (Wiedemann, in 'Ægyptische Zeitschrift,' 1878, pp. 2—6 and 87—89; 'Geschichte Ægyptens,' 1880, pp. 168—170). The value of prophecy does not, happily, depend on the minuteness of its correspondence with history, and the evidential value of the argument from such a correspondence is but secondary. Still, as long as such a correspondence can be proved, even in part, by facts such as Wiedemann has discovered, the apologist is perfectly justified in using it in confirmation of the authority of Scripture.

The second prophecy falls into two parts —vers. 14—19 and 20—26 respectively.

Vers. 14—19.—The cities of Egypt are called upon to prepare to meet the foe. But it is in vain; for all that is great and mighty in the land—Apis, the mercenary soldiers, and the Pharaoh—bows down before that terrible one who is comparable only to the most imposing objects in the inanimate world. Pharaoh's time is over; and Egypt must go into captivity.

Ver. 14.—**Declare ye**; viz. the approach of the foe (comp. ch. iv. 5). The news is to be told in the frontier towns Migdol and Tahpanhes, and in the northern capital Noph or Memphis (see on ch. ii. 16; xliv. 1). **The sword shall devour**, etc.; rather, *the sword hath devoured those round about thee.* The neighbouring nations (the same phrase occurs in ch. xlviii. 17, 39) have one after another succumbed; no ally is left there.

Ver. 15.—**Why are thy valiant** men, etc.? The literal rendering of the received text is, *Why is thy strong ones* (plural) *swept away* (or, *cast down*)? *He stood not, because Jehovah thrust him!* It is true that the first half of the verse might, consistently with grammar, be rendered, "Why are thy strong ones swept away?" But the following singulars prove that the subject of the verb in the first verse-half must itself be a singular. We must, therefore, follow the reading of the Septuagint, Vulgate, Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, and many of the extant Hebrew manuscripts, and change the plural "strong ones" into the singular

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"strong one." The word so rendered is elsewhere in Jeremiah one used (in the plural) of strong horses (ch. viii. 16; xlvii. 3; l. 11); but there is no necessity to bind ourselves to this acceptation. Other possible meanings are (1) strong man, *e.g.* Judg. v. 22 and Lam. i. 15; (2) steer, bull, *e.g.* Ps. xxii. 13 and l. 13, and (metaphorically of princes) lxviii. 31. It is a tenable view that "thy strong one" is to be understood distributively as equivalent to "every strong one of thine." But it is certainly more plausible to regard the phrase as a synonym for Apis, the sacred bull in which the supreme god Osiris was believed by the Egyptians to be incarnate. This was a superstition (strange, no doubt, but not so ignoble as some have thought) as deeply ingrained in the Egyptian mind as any in their complicated religion. "In fact, they believed that the supreme God was with them when they possessed a bull bearing certain hieratic marks, the signs of the incarnation of the divinity" (Pierret). His death was the signal for a mourning as general as for a Pharaoh, and the funeral ceremonies (accounts of which are given in the inscriptions) were equally splendid. M. Mariette has discovered, in the neighbourhood of Memphis, a necropolis in which the Apis-bulls were successively interred from the eighteenth dynasty to the close of the period of the Ptolemies. For the Apis to be "swept away" like ordinary plunder, or "cast down" in the slaughtering-trough (comp. Isa. xxxiv. 7), was indeed a token that the glory of Egypt had departed. It is a singular coincidence that the very word here employed by Jeremiah for "bull" (*abbîr*) was adopted (like many other words) into the Egyptian language—it received the slightly modified form *aber*. The Septuagint, it should be added, is in favour of the general view of the verse thus obtained, and the authority of the *Egyptian-Jewish* version in a prophecy relative to Egypt is not slight. Its rendering of the first half is, "Why hath Apis, thy chosen calf, fled?" But the probability is that it read the Hebrew differently, "Why hath Khaph (= Apis), thy chosen one, fled?" This merely involves grouping some letters otherwise, and reading one word a little differently.

Ver. 16.—**To fall**; rather, *to stumble*. The fugitives are in such a wild confusion that they stumble over each other. The parallel passage in the earlier prophecy (ver. 12) suggests that the Egyptian warriors are here referred to, the most trustworthy portion of which, since the time of Psammetichus, was composed of mercenaries, the native troops having lost that military ardour for which they had been anciently renowned (see Herod., ii. 152, and Sir Gardner Wilkinson's note *ap.* Rawlinson). Being devoid of patriotic feeling, it was natural that these hired soldiers should hasten from the doomed country, exclaiming, as the prophet puts it, **Arise, and let us go again to our own people.** Greeks were probably among the speakers, at any rate, Ionians and Carians formed the mercenary troops of Psammetichus, according to Herodotus (ii. 152).

Ver. 17.—**They did cry there**, etc.; rather, *they cry there*, viz. the following words. But why should attention be called to the place where the cry is made? and why should the mercenaries (the subject of the preceding verb, and therefore presumably of this verb) have their exclamation recorded? Alter the vowel-points (which merely represent an early but not infallible exegetical tradition), and all becomes clear. We then get a renewal of the summons in ver. 14 to make a proclamation respecting the war. The persons addressed are, not foreigners, but the children of the soil, and the summons runs thus: "Call ye the name of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, Desolation." No longer "Pharaoh," honoured by titles indicating that he, like Apis, is a Divine incarnation (*neb*, i.e. lord, and *nuter*, i.e. god), but *Shāōn*, the Hebrew for Desolation, is the fittest name for the fallen monarch. The custom of changing names with a symbolic meaning is no strange one to readers of the prophecies. We have met with it in this very book (see ch. xx. 3); and Isaiah contains a parallel as exact as could be desired, in the famous passage in which the prophetic name (itself symbolic) of Egypt (**Rahab**, *i.e.* boisterousness, arrogance) is changed into "Rahab-hem-shebheth" (*i.e.* "Rahab! they are utter indolence"). In behalf of this view we may claim the authority of a tradition still older than that preserved in the vowel-points, for the Septuagint (followed substantially by the Peshito and the Vulgate) has, Καλέσατε τὸ ὄνομα Φαραὼ Νεχαὼ βασιλέως Αἰγύπτου, Σαών. **He hath passed the time appointed.** A difficult clause, and variously interpreted. One thing is clear, that "passed" cannot be correct, as the verb is in the Hifil or causative conjugation. We must, at any rate, render, "He hath let the time appointed pass by." This is, in fact, the simplest and most natural explanation. There was a time within which repentance might have averted the judgment of God; but this "accepted time" has been foolishly let slip.

Ver. 18.—**The threat implied in ver. 17 is set forth more fully; he who speaks is a very different "king" from the fallen Pharaoh. As Tabor is among the mountains.**

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The sense is deformed by the insertion of "is." The King of Babylon is compared to "Tabor among the mountains and Carmel by the sea." Mount Tabor is a most prominent object, owing to the wide extent of the plain of Esdraelon, in which it is situated; and a similar remark applies to Mount Carmel. The view of Tabor differs considerably according to the point from which it is taken; but "its true figure is an elongated oval" (Thomson). Carmel, so called from the rich orchards and vineyards with which it was anciently adorned, is not lofty (being only about six hundred feet above the sea), but the form in which it breaks off towards the sea has a beauty of its own. It is now deprived of its rich forest and garden culture, but is still described as "a glorious mountain."

Ver. 19.—**O thou daughter dwelling in Egypt**; literally, *O inhabitress-daughter of Egypt.* The phrase is exactly parallel to "virgin daughter of Zion." The "daughter of Egypt" means the population of Egypt, the land being regarded as the mother of its people. **Furnish thyself to go into captivity.** The rendering of the margin is, however, more exact. The "vessels of captivity [or, 'exile']" are a pilgrim's staff and wallet, with the provisions and utensils necessary for a journey (so in Ezek. xii. 4).

Vers. 20—26.—A figurative description of the dark future of Egypt.

Ver. 20.—Like **a very fair heifer.** (The insertion of "like" weakens the passage.) The well-nourished heifer reminds of the prosperity of the fruitful Nile valley. But **destruction cometh; it cometh out of the north**; rather, *a gadfly from the north hath come upon her* (not, "hath come, hath come," as the received text has—a very slight change in one letter is required, supported by the versions). The figure is precisely analogous to that of the "bee in the land of Assyria" (Isa. vii. 18). St. Chrysostom renders "a gadfly" (see Field, 'Origen's Hexapla,' ii. 708); and so virtually Aquila and Symmachus.

Ver. 21.—**Also her hired men** are **in the midst of her**, etc.; rather, *also her hirelings in the midst of her are like*, etc. These seem to be distinguished from the mercenaries mentioned in ver. 9, the Ethiopians, Libyans, and Arabs, who were never adopted into the midst of the Egyptian people. On the other hand, the description will exactly apply to the Carians and Ionians in the service of Psammetichus and Apries (Herod., ii. 152, 163), who were "for many years" settled "a little below the city of Bubastis, on the Pelusiac mouth of the Nile." In this fertile country, itself comparable to "a very fair heifer" (ver. 20), these pampered and privileged mercenaries became "like calves of the stall." **They did not stand,** etc.; rather, *they have not stood (firm), for the day of their destruction is come upon them.*

Ver. 22.—**The voice thereof shall go like a serpent**; rather, *her voice is like (the sound of) a serpent gliding away.* Egypt (like Jerusalem, in Isa. xxix. 4) is imagined as a maiden (comp. ver. 19) seated on the ground, and faintly sighing; and her feeble voice is likened to the rustling sound of a serpent in motion. **Come against her with axes.** A sudden change of figure. Egypt, or, more strictly, Egypt's grandeur—its rich and complex national life, its splendid cities, its powerful army, all combined in one, is now compared to a forest (comp. ch. xxi. 14; xxii. 6, 7; Isa. ii. 13; x. 18, 19, 33, 34). It seems far-fetched to suppose, with Graf and Dr. Payne Smith, that the comparison of the Chaldean warriors to wood-cutters arose from their being armed with axes. It is probably true that the Israelites did not use the battle-axe, but the axe is merely an accident of the description. It is the forest which suggests the mention of the axe, not the axe that of the forest, and forests were familiar enough to the Israelites.

Ver. 23.—**They shall cut down**; better, *they cut down.* The prophet is describing a picture which passes before his inner eye. **Though it cannot be searched**; rather, *for it cannot be searched out.* The subject of the verb is uncertain. De Dieu's explanation is, "Because the forest is so dense, so intricate, it is necessary to clear a path by cutting down the trees." But this does not seem to suit the context. Surely no other reason was required for the destruction of the "forest" than the will of the wood-cutters. "Searching out" occurs in Job (v. 9; ix. 10; xxxvi. 26; comp. also 1 Kings vii. 47) in connection with numbering, and the second half of the verse expressly describes the foe as innumerable. The singular alternates with the plural, as in Isa. v. 28, a host being regarded sometimes as a whole, and sometimes as an aggregate of individuals. **Than the grasshoppers**; rather, *the locust.* The name is one of nine which we find given to the various species of locusts in the Old Testament, and means "multitudinous."

Ver. 24.—**Shall be confounded**; rather, *is brought to shame;* the next verb too should rather be in the past tense.

Ver. 25.—**The multitude of No**; rather, *Amon of No.* Amon-Ra, or rather Amen-Ra, was the name adopted at Thebes (Homer's Thebes "of the hundred gateways," 'Iliad,' ix. 383, called here "No," and in Nah. iii. 8 "No [of] Amon") from the time of the eleventh dynasty, for the sun-god Ra. Amon (Amen) signifies "hidden," for it is the mysterious, invisible deity who

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manifests himself in bodily form in the sun. From this name comes the classic designation, Jupiter-Ammon. **Their gods . . . their kings**; rather, *her gods . . . her kings* (viz. Egypt's). The "kings" are probably the high officials of the state, not a few of whom were either by birth or marriage members of the royal family. **Even Pharaoh, and all them that trust in him.** With a suggestive allusion to the many in Judah who "trusted" in that "broken reed" (Isa. xxxvi. 6).

Ver. 26.—**Afterward it shall be inhabited,** etc. After all these gloomy vaticinations, Jeremiah (as elsewhere in this group of prophecies; see ch. xlviii. 47; xlix. 6, 39) opens up a brighter prospect. "In the days of old," patriarchal and unmilitary, the fertile valley of the Nile offered a peaceful and a happy home to its teeming inhabitants; those times shall yet come again. To understand this, we must assume that during its period of depression Egypt has been but sparsely peopled, owing to the large numbers of its inhabitants carried away captive. Another explanation, "afterwards Egypt shall stay at home [*i.e.* 'be quiet']," though equally justifiable from the point of view of the lexicon (comp. Judg. v. 17; Ps. lv. 7), seems less natural. Possibly Ezek. xxix. 13—16 is a development of our passage; it contains a promise of future remission of punishment, though a promise qualified in such a way as to be akin to a threat. The words, "And it shall no more be the confidence of the house of Israel" (Ezek. xxix. 16), seem like a comment on Jeremiah's threat to "Pharaoh, and them that trust in him," in the preceding verse.

Vers. 27, 28.—A word of comfort to Israel, obviously not written at the same time as the preceding prophecy. The prophet is suddenly transported in imagination into the period of the Babylonian exile. Egypt and its fortunes are far away; the troubles of Israel entirely absorb his attention. After thinking sadly of the reverses of his people, he bursts out with an encouraging exhortation not to fear, though, humanly speaking, there was everything to fear. Did Jeremiah write these verses here? There is strong reason to doubt it; for they occur, with insignificant variations, in ch. xxx. 10, 11, where they cohere far better with the context than here.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—26.—*The judgment of Egypt.* This is twofold, first in the defeat at Carchemish (vers. 1—12), and then in a complete overthrow of the kingdom (vers. 13—26), which Jeremiah seems to have anticipated immediately after, just as the early Christians connected the destruction of Jerusalem with the expected end of the world. Though this anticipation was not chronologically correct, the essence of the prophecy was ultimately fulfilled. The kingdom of the Pharaohs has passed away.

I. EGYPT WAS A HEATHEN COUNTRY. The two prophecies about Egypt occur first in a series of predictions concerning the Gentile nations. God is the God of the Gentile as well as the Jew, of the heathen as well as the Christian, of the godless as well as the godly. In him all men live and move and have their being; from him they receive every blessing of life; to him they will have to give account of their deeds. Therefore God notes the conduct of heathen nations, and chastises them when needful; so he does with individual men who renounce his authority over them or are brought up in ignorance of it. The heathen will be judged by their heathenish light, and not by the high standards of Christian principles; but there is enough in that light to allow of a genuine judgment and a just sentence (Rom. ii. 14, 15). The 'Book of the Dead' contains a high and noble system of morality. With this in his possession, the Egyptian was without excuse in his vice and cruelty.

II. EGYPT WAS AN ANCIENT NATION. Her history dates back long before the time of Abraham. But she found no immunity in age. If judgment is long delayed, it will come in God's appointed time. The mere continuance of peaceful circumstances hitherto is not the slightest ground for crediting them with a special charm to ward off the sentence of Divine justice. The hoary sinner will not be spared out of regard to his years. Age is not venerable in itself. It is only odious when it is the ripening and rotting of a long life of sin.

III. EGYPT WAS A LAND OF WEALTH AND SPLENDOUR. (For this point, see homily on ver. 20.)

IV. EGYPT WAS A HOME OF SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY. There philosophy arose, and the knowledge of nature was first systematically pursued. There strange mystic religions

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had their birth. If knowledge could save a people, Egypt of all lands should be safe. But though knowledge is power, there are foes against which it is impotent. The science of the encyclopædists was no protection against the horrors of the French Revolution. Modern science cannot find an antidote to sin, nor can modern inventiveness devise any armour that shall resist the piercing darts of Divine justice. Our religious speculation will not redeem our souls.

V. EGYPT WAS THE ALLY OF ISRAEL. The alliance of the Church is no safeguard when the Church herself is erring. Companionship in sin with men who have been accounted Christians will do nothing to lighten the weight of guilt. They will have to suffer for their share in the wickedness, and if their previous reputation cannot shield them, it can have no protection to extend to others.

VI. EGYPT MADE A BRAVE RESISTANCE. Jeremiah describes the battle array in stirring words. The army was imposing. Yet was defeated. It is vain to resist the decree of Divine judgment. He who fights against this is striking at Heaven. The blow can only recoil on his own head.

VII. EGYPT WAS TO BE INHABITED AGAIN. God mingles mercy with judgment. He has pity on the heathen. He seeks the ultimate recovery of those whom he first punishes. In later years Egypt became the home and centre of the most brilliant Christian life and thought.

Ver. 11.—*Incurable diseases.* I. WHAT DISEASES ARE NATURALLY INCURABLE? 1. *Sin.* No man can root out his own evil nature. The wicked man, left to himself, will never grow into righteousness. Sin does not burn out; it continually finds fresh fuel and kindles a greater fire. 2. *The judgment of sin.* This cannot be resisted, for it comes from the hand of the Almighty. It cannot be bought off by compensating merits, for the most we can do is not to deserve more punishment in the future by new sin. When we have done our best we are "unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do."

II. HOW GOD CURES THE NATURALLY INCURABLE DISEASE. Christ is the good Physician, the great Healer. Where medicine fails miracle triumphs. She who "had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse," was made whole by a touch of the hem of the Saviour's garment. The cure may be impossible with man, but with God all things are possible. 1. *The cure for sin.* This is in the new birth which makes the Christian a "new creation" in Christ Jesus, and the constant aid of the Spirit of God to cleanse and purify the soul. 2. *The cure for the judgment of sin.* This is in the free pardon offered to the penitent who trust to Christ, and it is secured through his mediation, his one sacrifice for sin, and his perpetual intercession for sinners.

Ver. 20.—*The heifer and the gadfly.* "Egypt is a very fair heifer, but a gadfly cometh."

I. WORLDLY ADVANTAGES ARE NO SAFEGUARDS AGAINST TROUBLE. The heifer is very fair, yet the gadfly attacks her. Egypt, rich in her fertile Nile valley, the granary of the East; splendid with vast and gorgeous temples, whose ruins are now the wonder of the world; in the forefront of speculation and science; hoary with antiquity, and proud of her æons of history even in Jeremiah's age—twenty-five dynasties had already passed away;—this great Egypt is to suffer humiliation at the hand of the upstart Babylon. Her very magnificence attracts the greedy invader. Wealth and rank may ward off some distresses, but they will invite others which never condescend to attack the poor and obscure.

II. WORLDLY ADVANTAGES AFFORD LITTLE CONSOLATION IN TROUBLE. If the heifer is very fair, her beauty is no antidote to the pain she feels when the probe of the gadfly is in her back. Egypt may have every advantage of wealth and science, and yet she finds no comfort in these things when her life-blood is flowing beneath the sword of the rude invader. The death of her firstborn is as heavy a blow to the queen as to the meanest slave in the land. The rich man feels his gout at least as acutely as the poor man. Mental distress, anxiety, and care are not to be bought off with money.

III. A SMALL OCCASION MAY PRODUCE GREAT TROUBLE. The gadfly is but half an inch long. Yet it can so irritate the heifer that she will rush madly about, with head

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thrust forward and tail stuck out, in the vain hope of escaping from her tormentor. Many a man has just one cause of trouble, looking to others quite insignificant, yet which is to him the fly spoiling the most precious ointment. How much of the distress of life comes from the fret and worry of little things! It is a comfort that we are not only invited to cast our burden upon the Lord, but to cast all our "care upon him, for he careth for us."

IV. WE MAY BE UNABLE TO PREVENT THE ATTACK OF THE SMALLEST OCCASION OF TROUBLE. The horns, which would be good weapons for attacking a large animal, are useless against the gadfly. Many troubles come like this fly. We cannot touch them; they are swift to attack, and once they are upon us no defence is possible. In our own strength we cannot throw off the smallest sin. Perhaps we are strong to resist great temptations, and fall victims to miserable little failings. The devil is not always a roaring lion; sometimes he is more like a gadfly. We can drive off the lion; we cannot resist the gadfly. Lying, theft, murder, etc., may be kept out, and yet our souls may lose all peace and Divine communion by yielding to hasty temper, discontent, cowardice, etc. But Christ comes as the Saviour from all evil and all sin, including those meaner sins which may ruin our spiritual life even when greater sins are avoided.

Vers. 27, 28.—(See homily on ch. xxx. 10, 11.)

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*The judgment of the nations.* I. UTTERED BY THE PROPHET OF THE THEOCRACY. 1. *Because they are related to the theocracy.* Even in antagonism; but sometimes in conscious or undesigned co-operation. The future of the kingdom of God is not, therefore, to evolve itself independently of these, but in close connection with them. It is this, and this alone, which gives them their importance. They are associated with the destinies of God's people. What mysterious necessity is it that ever blends God's kingdom with the main stream of history? It is the dominant influence even when it seems to be temporarily overthrown. 2. *The kingdom of God is to be fulfilled in the whole earth.* Not only in Israel is it to come, but in the "uttermost parts of the earth." The kingdoms of this world are to "become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ" (Rev. xi. 15). For this reason their history, too, is sacred, and is to be read in the light of revelation if it is to be understood. The true history of every nation and individual is determined by relation to the truth of God. 3. *For the instruction and comfort of God's people.* It is manifest that Divine providence can be explained worthily only upon such a scale. And the subjects of the Divine kingdom have to be taught the real character and destiny of the powers into relation with which they are brought. God is seen as ruling, not only in a little corner, but in the whole earth.

II. UTTERED TOGETHER AT ONE TIME. There is a question as to which order ought to be observed in mentioning them. 1. But the selection is made upon an evident principle, viz. that of (nearly) contemporaneous relation to Israel. And whatever their relations amongst themselves or toward Israel at any given time, *in general they are opposed to the kingdom of God*, and represent the influences with which it has to do in its progress amongst men. They are "the world-powers" as opposed to the "powers of the world to come." 2. It is part of the scheme of Divine revelation to arraign from time to time the spirit of this world in its varying forms and phases. The world's life and history thus cease to be complex and involved, and are seen to resolve themselves into the principles of good and evil, darkness and light. The turmoil and movement are really those of a great duel—that of the kingdom of God against the kingdom of this world.

III. UTTERED FINALLY AND ABSOLUTELY. It is destruction that is predicted, and as real historic powers we do not hear of them again. There is something very grand and solemn in this arraying and dismissal of the nations. Their political influence, military power, or commercial supremacy avails not against this imperative Word of the Most High. What is it but an anticipation of the judgment of the earth by the Son of man

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(Matt. xxv. 31)? Has not our Saviour already ground for his claim, "I have overcome the world"? The gospel of the kingdom of God is, therefore, no little thing done in a corner, but the economy of a world, and the law of life and death throughout all ages.—M.

Vers. 27, 28.—(*Vide* on ch. xxx. 10, 11.)—M.

Vers. 1—28.—"*Judgment*" *going on* "*from the house of God.*" The former chapters have shown judgment beginning at the house of God. This and the following chapters show that judgment going on.

I. JUDGMENT BEGINS AT THE HOUSE OF GOD. This whole life here is more or less a time of trial. God never suffers his Church to be long at ease. But there are especial times of trial, as in persecutions, bereavements, uprisings of the power of sin. And sometimes, as in the former chapters is told, God sends his actual judgments and chastisements upon his people. Now, concerning this, note: 1. *It is just that judgment should begin at*, etc. For God has a right to the reverence and obedience of his own people. If a father be not obeyed in his own house, where else should he be? More of light, privilege, and grace are given to his Church, and more of ill follows from their sin; and hence no wonder that judgment begins, etc. 2. *And it is fit and suitable.* Who cares for the household as the father? I hear a child in the streets use profane or foul language, and I am shocked that any child should use language like that. But if it were *my* child, with what horror and indignation should I be filled! All the father's affection clusters round and centres in his home, and hence he will spare no pains nor refuse any methods—even judgments when they are needed, as once and again they are—whereby the highest well-being of his children may be secured. 3. *And it is merciful likewise.* It was not judgment, but mercy also, that "drove out the man" from Paradise. Some discipline sterner than Paradise afforded was needed now for the subdual of that evil nature which had become dominant in man. And that nature must be subdued and the better nature formed in us, or the high and holy purpose of God cannot be fulfilled in us.

II. BUT IT DOES NOT STOP THERE. To show this is the purport of this and the following chapters. 1. *And how true this is generally!* There is the sorrow of the world as well as that of the believer; and who would not rather have that of the believer than that of the world? 2. *And how much greater is the sorrow of the world!* "If they do these things in the green tree, what," etc.? said our Saviour. "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where," etc.? said St. Peter. And that "their sorrows shall be multiplied" is inevitable. For they have *no inward spring of consolation* beneath them. There is so *much more to be done* in order to rescue them from their ways. The processes of agriculture are sometimes severe; but what are they compared to the stern work needed for bringing the land into cultivation. The police of a well-ordered town cause some burden to the inhabitants; but what is that to martial law? *They touch the all of the world, only the lesser good of the believer. And they stay so much longer time.* There was no such restoration for the Gentile people told of here as there was and especially will be for the Jewish race. The Church of Christ has often been judged, but she has ever been restored, and will be yet more. But during her history, Rome, Venice, and political states within Christendom have risen, decayed, and disappeared. 3. *How admonitory all this is!* (1) *To the child of the house of God.* It bids him be thankful because he knows the motive, the measure, and the sure end of what he has to bear. Submission that he may at once escape the heavy hand of God and shelter in his heart. (2) *To those not in the house of God.* It says, "Come in, that judgment may be turned into chastisement, wrath into fatherly correction, and that the gates of death when they close upon you may shut out the further approach of sorrow, and not, as if there be no repentance they will, shut you in with it and with innumerable other sorrows more than the first. 'Verily I say unto you,' saith our Lord, 'ye shall not come out thence until ye have paid the uttermost farthing.'"—C.

Ver. 8.—*Premature glorying.* In this verse and in others we have the vain vauntings of Egypt. Thus far the judgments of God have been declared against his people. Now, having begun at the house of God, judgment goes on to the Gentile nations, one

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after another of whom are told of in the chapters that succeed this, and ending with the judgment on Babylon. Egypt and Babylon were the two great empires between which unhappy Judæa was "like a nut between the forceps," so that when these two drew together it went ill with the little kingdom that lay between. Now, in these chapters Egypt takes the lead and Babylon closes, the lesser nations occupying the central position. The invasion and conquest of Egypt is the subject of this forty-sixth chapter from the thirteenth verse. Its decisive defeat at Carchemish is told of in the previous portion. It was in anticipation of that disastrous battle that Egypt, persuading herself that it would issue so differently, is heard uttering the proud boastings of this eighth verse. At first it seemed as if these boastings were not vain, for at Megiddo, where King Josiah was slain, the Egyptian army did obtain a victory; but, three years after, when they had pushed on to the banks of the Euphrates, Nebuchadnezzar fell upon them there and completely vanquished them. Crestfallen and crushed, they had to make their weary way back to their own land; and shortly after we read (2 Kings xxiv. 7), "the King of Egypt came not again any more out of his land: for the King of Babylon had taken from the river of Egypt unto the river Euphrates all that pertained to the King of Egypt." That was what came of all their vauntings, and the history is a noticeable one on many grounds. Now, it recalls to our mind the wise exhortation, "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off" (1 Kings xx. 11). Let us note—

I. SOME MANIFESTATIONS OF THIS SPIRIT of over-confidence. The Bible is full of facts which illustrate this spirit. Pharaoh, in the days of Moses, asking, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?" Goliath of Gath striding down the valley in furious pride to meet the stripling David. He swore by all his gods he would give those young limbs as a prey for the vultures to feed upon. Rabshakeh, again, general of the host of the King of Assyria, terrifying and dismaying the devout Hezekiah with his fearful threatenings. And we know how the distress lasted until Hezekiah took the letter of the haughty heathen and laid it before the Lord. Then, serene and strong, his spirit rose up, and he was able to make fit answer. And we know how Jehovah avenged Judah, her king, and her people upon the vast multitude of their foes who in battle array lay around them. For—

> "Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown,
> That host on the morrow lay withered and strown;
> For the angel of death spread his wings on the blast,
> And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed.
>
> "And the tents were all silent, the banners alone;
> The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown;
> And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
> Had melted like snow in the glance of the Lord."

And we think, too, of Haman in his rage at Mordecai, vowing vengeance, and surely reckoning on wreaking it to the full. And Samson, imagining that nothing could deprive him of his great strength, so confident that at any moment he could break through every barrier, but at length enticed, betrayed, overcome, and ruined. And, passing to the region of spiritual things, we think of Israel pledging themselves, as they stood at the foot of Mount Sinai, to perfect obedience. Of that rich "fool" of whom our Lord tells, and who made so sure of many years to enjoy his "much goods" laid up in store. And of the many who were candidates for discipleship, avowing themselves ready to follow him everywhere. And of Peter, boasting that, though all men should forsake the Lord, yet would not he. And Judas, who trembled not to take the office of apostleship though so incapable of sustaining it. And *in common life* how often we see this same spirit! Our Afghan disasters in 1879 were largely owing to it. But *in spiritual life* there is the same peril. There may not be the uttered words of vain vaunting, but the spirit may be there notwithstanding. For how little there is of the trembling, the watchful, the prayerful spirit lest we should be overcome! How far too much tampering with temptation! How few "pass the time of their sojourning here in fear" lest they should "seem to come short" of eternal life! How many are like the foolish virgins, who, all careless as to the unsupplied

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condition of their oil-vessels, nevertheless contentedly lay down to sleep! How many are at ease in Zion, allowing themselves in a carnal security which too often is but the herald of a fearful awakening!

II. INQUIRE—WHAT LEADS TO THIS SPIRIT? Some are of a boastful disposition. These Egyptians evidently were. He concerning whom the cautionary words already quoted were used, "Let not him that girdeth on his harness," etc., was another such habitual boaster. And this is human nature. Our pride dies hard, but is puffed up with wonderful ease. Then: 2. *False estimates* have a great deal to do with it. *Under-estimating* our adversaries', *over-estimating* our own, resources and strength. Hence Benhadad, who thought such scorn of Israel, on the very eve of battle was, we are told, drinking himself drunk in his tent. Hence many are found dallying with danger, fluttering, mothlike, round the flame by which they are sure soon to perish miserably. The jocular way in which the devil is so generally spoken of proves that we do but little believe in him; for what men seriously believe they never joke about. And this false estimate is rendered more credible to us if we have obtained aught of success heretofore. Egypt had at Megiddo; Benhadad had. Hence their estimates. 3. *Perversion of God's truth.* We encourage ourselves in this spirit of over-confidence by dwelling too exclusively on promises of protection to the neglect of those which command all watchfulness and prayer. Men will read *parts* of the Bible only—those which please them most; and without doubt many have dwelt so much on the promises of God's upholding grace and his perfecting that which he begins, that they have laid ide their armour—that indispensable armour of God. But any reading of God's Word which leads us thus practically to disobey his command is thereby proved to be a wrong reading. For, just as the chemist's litmus paper, plunged into a solution containing acid, at once reveals by its turning red the presence of that acid, however invisible and imperceptible it may have been before, so any interpretation of the Scriptures which leads to false security, premature and presumptuous confidence, which makes us red with this sad sin, proves that that interpretation contains the acid of falsehood. It is a sure test. God help us to heed it as we should.

III. NOTE WHAT MISCHIEF IT WORKS. These are seen strewn over every pathway along which this spirit hath been; like the bleached bones in the desert show the track of the caravan.

IV. Consider, therefore, SOME SAFEGUARDS AGAINST IT. God himself at times undertakes its cure. He did so with Peter. He let him go his way and fall, and in that crash the spirit of boastfulness was for ever crushed. But we shall be aided by remembering the words of Christ and his apostles and of all his most faithful servants. They all warn against this spirit, and urge the spirit of watchfulness and prayer. Remember, too, that better men than ourselves have fallen. The very fact that armour is provided shows that we need it. And note that there are chinks in your armour; and that some armour is of very worthless sort.

CONCLUSION. Whilst bidding you boast not, with equal emphasis we say, "Despond not." "The gist of all this is, confide in God, but distrust yourselves. Have done with every glorying except glorying in the Lord. . . . There is nothing like full assurance for excellence, and nothing like presumption for worthlessness. Never mistake the one for the other. You cannot trust God too much nor yourself too little. I read a book one day called 'Self-Made Men,' and in its own sphere it was excellent; but spiritually I should not like to be a self-made man. I should think he would be an awful specimen of humanity. At any rate, a self-made Christian is one of a sort the devil very soon takes, as I have seen a child so take a bran doll and shake it all out. He likes to shake out self-made Christians till there is nothing left of them. But God-made men,—these are they that do exploits; and God-made Christians, who fall back upon the eternal strength at all times and confide there,—these are the men to hold on their way and to wax stronger and stronger" (Spurgeon).—C.

Ver. 10.—*The terror of sacrifice without its blessing.* The ancient sacrifices had much about them that was very repulsive. The slaughtering and dismemberment of the vast herds of animals that were year by year brought to the altar must have involved in it very much that was of a revolting nature. No doubt their sensitiveness to such scenes of blood was far less than ours; but at the best it must have been a

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most painful spectacle. Hence scoffers have called it the religion of the shambles. But the salvation and blessing that came through the sacrifices divested them of all that was painful or repulsive to the offerer. But there may be all that is terrible about sacrifice—agony, blood, death, carnage—without any corresponding blessing. Such is the meaning here. Slaughter, but no salvation. The same word for "sacrifice" is used as in those which were offered according to the Law on the altar in the temple. And so in the parallel passages in Isa. xxxiv. 6 and Ezek. xxxix. 17, which should be compared with this, and which are alluded to by St. John in the Revelation. In all these there is the terror of sacrifice, but none of its blessing. And there is that which corresponds to this now. Even Christ's sacrifice may be a terror and not a salvation. It is so to: 1. *Those who refuse it.* 2. *Those who apostatize from it,* who count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, trampling underfoot the Son of God (Heb. x.). 3. *Those who make it the minister of sin.* Who "turn the grace of God into lasciviousness." There is, then, a twofold aspect of the Lord's sacrifice. Either it must be that by it we rise or fall. "This child is set for the fall and rising again." The gospel is "a savour of life unto life, or," etc. Christ is a Rock on which we may build, or which, falling on the impenitent, crushes him to powder. Which for *ourselves?*—C.

Ver. 15.—*The real cause of the decline of empires.* "Because the Lord did drive them." If we read ordinary histories, the overthrow of any monarchy is traced to such an invasion or to the loss of such a battle, or to some other ordinary and well-known cause. And no doubt it is true that, through and by these things, the said results have been brought about. But there is ever a moral cause which lies behind, and it is to that must be traced up the series of events which have followed. The history of most ancient empires, in their origin, progress, decline, and fall, has been very much the same. A hardy, temperate, courageous people, driven by necessity or attracted by the hope of gain, fall upon some decrepit power, destroy it, and on its ruins build their own fortunes. For a while the same courage and virtue which enabled them to gain possession of their prize are manifested in consolidating their power and in building up their rule. But after the lapse of years, they have gained secure foothold and are able to live less on their guard against enemies. Wealth and luxury increase and exert their enervating power. In this soil the vices, whatever they may be, to which as a people they are predisposed, grow rapidly and affect the national habit and character. Then their decay has begun. It hastens rapidly on until, in their turn, this once victorious people are vanquished, overthrown by a nation more bold and righteous and therefore more powerful than themselves. This law can be readily traced in the histories of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and in more modern instances as well. Were there no moral causes at work in the overthrow of the French empire under Napoleon I.? In all cases it will be seen that, in one form or another, God's love of righteousness has been outraged, and vengeance has speedily, or surely if not speedily, come. What was the Reformation but the revolt of men's consciences against the abominable sins of the Catholic Church? But how came that Church—once so fair, so beautiful, so glorious—to have sunk so low as to become hateful in men's eyes? It was this same enervating influence of wealth, power, and other forms of earthly prosperity which sapped her spiritual strength until she became utterly unworthy of men's confidence, and she was punished, and is so to this day, by the loss of well-nigh all Northern Europe, the noblest half of her ancient domain. Therefore learn—

I. WHAT ARE NOT A COUNTRY'S SAFEGUARDS, THOUGH OFTEN THOUGHT TO BE. Not *commerce,* or Tyre would not have fallen. Not *art,* or Greece would never have perished. Not *strong political organization,* or Rome would have continued. Not *religious profession,* or Jerusalem and Catholic Rome would not have suffered the disasters that befell them. Not *ancient renown,* or Egypt would have stood fast. All these things have been relied on, and especially *vast armies,* but they have one and all been tested and have proved ropes of sand, battlements taken away because they are not the Lord's. Therefore note—

II. WHAT IS A COUNTRY'S SAFEGUARD? There is but one answer, and that is *righteousness.* It, and it alone, exalteth a nation. The form of government, whether monarchical or republican, matters not, whether political power be in the hands of

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the many or the few, but the character of the people—their possession or not possession of the "fear of the Lord." Whilst Israel possessed this she was impregnable. "A thousand fell at her side, and," etc.

III. WHAT, THEREFORE, IS TRUE PATRIOTISM? Not alone adding to the material wealth or the intellectual force of the nation, not alone philanthropy or political energy,—none of these things are to be held in light esteem; but the truest patriotism, and it is one which all can exhibit, is the cultivation of godly character, that fear of God which lies at the basis of all moral excellence whatsoever. Yes, not for our own salvation's sake alone, but for our country's sake, even as for Christ's sake, let us seek to resemble him, breathe his Spirit, manifest his character, copy his example, and spread abroad those true principles of national well-being which, by his life and death, he taught us.—C.

Ver. 26.—*Punishment not destruction but purification and preservation.* In ver. 28, in ch. xlviii. 21, and in ch. xlix. 6, 39, we have similar assurances that "afterwards," when God's judgments have done their work, the chastised and afflicted nations shall be restored. Such promise is here made to Egypt. It is repeated in Ezek. xxix. 8—14. And from this reiterated word concerning, not one people only, but so many, we gather the intent and purpose of God in regard to all his punishments which he sends upon men—that they are not for men's destruction, but for their purification and preservation. Note—

I. SOME OF THE BASES OF THIS BELIEF. 1. *Such Scriptures* as these now referred to. 2. The *salutary results* that have followed so much of human suffering. That suffering has shamed indolence, roused energy, stimulated invention, and the results have been safeguards to life and health and general well-being, which would never have been thought of or sought after if suffering had not goaded men on. Hence we conclude that such results were intended and ever are by like causes. 3. The fact that *God created man.* It is incredible that he should create beings whose destiny is an eternity of sin and suffering. If it had been really better for any men that they had never been born, as in this case it undoubtedly would, and as for far less and altogether inadequate reasons we sometimes say it would concerning ourselves or others, then they never would have been born. Our Lord's word concerning Judas is not to be literally pressed. It was a proverbial expression used concerning especially unhappy or ungodly men. 4. The very *name of "Saviour."* Christ either is or is not the Saviour of the world. If he be not, but only fain would be, then the name of "Saviour" cannot be truly his. We do not give the names of "deliverer," "saviour," "benefactor," to those who only desire to be such but are not such. We are forced to believe—and with what thankfulness we would do so!—that he who is called "the Lamb of God" does not merely in wish, but in fact, "take away the sins of the world." 5. The *value of the great sacrifice.* If it do not reconcile the world unto God, as St. Paul affirms it does, then it is less precious than men have thought. But it is inconceivable that such a sacrifice should fail to accomplish that for which it was especially designed. 6. The *express declaration* that the Son of God was *manifested to destroy the works of the devil.* But are not sin and suffering his work? If, then, they be eternal, how can they have been destroyed? 7. The *necessity involved in the first and great command,* "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," etc. Now, it is not in the power of the human heart to love any being that it does not conceive as lovable or worthy of love. But a God who created men, knowing that they would eternally sin and suffer, is not lovable by the human heart. What do we say of men who do deeds which they know can only issue in misery and wrong? But is that righteous in God which we should denounce in men? *Abhorrendum sit.*

II. CONCLUSION. 1. *Not that there is no such thing* as God's punishment for sin. 2. *Nor that that punishment is but a little thing.* Ah, no! "It is a fearful thing" for an impenitent unbelieving man "to fall into the hands of the living God." He is a consuming fire to such, and the fire will burn on until all the dross and evil be burnt out. Wellington said, "There is only one thing worse than a great victory, and that is a great defeat." He knew at what cost victory is won. And so there may be only one thing worse than some men's salvation, and that is that they should be eternally lost. 3. *But that we should learn to "love and dread" God.* Love him for his gracious purpose

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towards men, but dread lest we should compel him by our rejection of his gospel to lead us by sterner ways. For he *will* have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.—C.

Ver. 28.—*Correction, but in measure.* (Cf. homily on *God's reserve of mercy*, vol. i. p. 95.)—C.

Ver. 15.—*Why the valiant are swept away.* I. THEY ARE SWEPT AWAY. Notice the host described in previous verses of the chapter—horsemen and chariots and archers; the Ethiopian, the Libyan, the Lydian; an imposing host, whose magnificence could not but strike the eye. It was meant that they should produce a feeling of being irresistible. And thus in due time, when they were scattered and broken up, there came a complete contrast. The magnificence, the order, the force, were all somehow utterly vanished. The present overthrow became all the more noticeable because of the magnitude of what had been overthrown. And so God will ever make plain the sweeping away of all his foes. Their defeat is not left a doubtful thing. It may be very difficult to account for, but it cannot be questioned.

II. THE NEED FOR ASKING WHY THEY ARE SWEPT AWAY. 1. Because of *their magnificent appearance.* They look strong, and according to a certain standard they are strong. This Egyptian army had been gathered together to do a certain work. It was known that they had to meet no common and easily conquered foe. Therefore there were strong men on strong horses, with powerful weapons and well defended. Yet after all this preparation there came, not merely defeat, but what is called a sweeping away. Assuredly this wants explaining. 2. Because of *past victories.* We cannot suppose they were an untried host. If they had won battles and campaigns before, why did they lose this? And why were they so utterly and lastingly defeated? 3. Because there is no *obvious explanation.* It is not to be looked for in the strength of their human opponents. It is not to be found in some difference between what they were in the hour of confusion and what they had been in previous hours of victory. There is no ground to say they were less brave, less disciplined, worse commanded. The reason for this sweeping away, whatever it be, passes ordinary human search.

III. THE SUFFICIENT REASON IS FOUND IN THE ACTION OF JEHOVAH. Jehovah drove them. All forces that find expression in matter are completely at God's disposal. He can paralyze the mightiest army in a moment. The mighty man is not to glory in his might (ch. ix. 23). True it is that God lets the strong man do generally all his strength permits him to do. The success military men look for is on the side of the strongest battalions. But then all strength of this sort fails against spiritual strength. Not all the armies of Rome and not all the wild beasts of the amphitheatre could persuade a single true Christian to forsake Christ. The strength of this world achieves great things in its own field, but directly it goes beyond and tries to interfere with conscience and spiritual aspirations, its weakness is made manifest.—Y.

Vers. 27, 28.—*God's care of his own.* I. THE NEED OF THE FULLEST POSSIBLE ASSURANCE. Jehovah, who has visited Israel with many and great sufferings, will also visit other peoples. Egypt is spoken of in this chapter; and Philistia, Moab Ammon, and Babylon in following chapters. Hence the need of Divine words such as would keep the believing element in Israel calm and confident through all these disturbances, and so it ever is meant to be with the true Israel of God. God is ready with comforting words amid the necessary turmoil of external conditions.

II. THE SOLID GROUNDS OF THIS ASSURANCE. They lie in Jehovah's continued connection with Israel, and his purposes for its safety, peace, and prosperity. We have no assurance in ourselves or our circumstances, but the moment we can feel that we are in God's hands, that he has plans with respect to us, and a future preparing for us, then assurance is possible. God never tells man to take courage and put away fear without giving good reason for the exhortation, and showing that fear is rather the unreasonable feeling to allow. The moment we can take in the full force of that wonderful word, "I am with thee," then we are freed from alarms and from dependence on the shifting phenomena of this present life.

III. THE DIFFERENCE GOD WILL MAKE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND OTHER NATIONS. A

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full end is to be made of them. And a full end has been made of them. Here, of course, the distinction must be borne in mind between nations and the individuals composing them. A nation is but a certain arrangement of human beings, and this arrangement may be productive of such wrong feelings and such danger to the world as to make it fitting that the nation should cease. But the people composing the nation remain, and their descendants pass into new and better combinations. So with regard to Israel; the people who are to return and be in rest and without fear, the people who are not to be made a full end of, are those of whom literal Israel is but the type. There are really but two nations in the world—those who believe in God and in his Son, and show their faith by their works; and those who trust in themselves, in their power and their purposes. Of all these latter God must make a full end, if in no other way by bringing them to see their folly, so that they may turn to the ways of faith.

IV. JEHOVAH'S CHASTISEMENT OF HIS OWN EVEN WHILE HE PROTECTS THEM. There is a purpose in all suffering, a real need for it. Men seem to be mixed up indiscriminately, and suffering looks as if it often fell irrespective of character, but this is only a seeming. The suffering of Israel, though it may look the same outwardly, is really as different as possible from the suffering of Egypt. There is a fire which ends in the destruction of what passes through it. It must be so, for the thing is destructible and shows its nature when the fire tries it. The same fire attacking indestructible things only separates destructible accretions from them, and consumes these accretions away. God's intention is that the believer may be able to say, "I cannot be destroyed in this furnace of trials; I cannot go to pieces as others do. But still I must remain in it for a while; I must submit to God's wise ordinances so that at last I may return to my true rest and fear no more for ever."—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XLVII.

PROPHECY ON THE PHILISTINES.

It is clear from the contents of the prophecy (and the inference is thoroughly confirmed by its position) that it was written after the battle of Carchemish, with reference to the dreaded northern foe—Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. The prophecy against Egypt precedes, because Egypt was by far the most important of the nations threatened by the advance of Nebuchadnezzar. But chronologically and geographically, it ought rather to have been placed at the end of the series, for Palestine had to be conquered before a design upon Egypt could have a reasonable chance of success. The commentators have given themselves much unnecessary trouble with the heading in ver. 1, which assigns the date of the prophecy to a period prior (as it would seem) to the battle of Carchemish. They forget that the headings are not to be received without criticism as historical evidence for the date of the prophecies. Knowing, as we do, that the prophecies were edited, not only by the disciples of the prophets, but by students of the Scriptures long after their time, it is gratuitously embarrassing one's self to give as much historical weight to the statement of a heading as to a clear inference from the contents of a prophecy. No doubt Providence watched over the movements of the editors; they must even be credited with a degree of inspiration, so far as moral and religious truths are concerned; but they were not exempt from being dependent on the ordinary sources of information in matters of history. It would seem, then, that, out of the various sieges of Gaza in the last century of the Jewish state, one in particular had fixed itself in the memory of the Jews; and it was not a siege by the Babylonians, but by the Egyptians. Seeing a reference to Gaza in ver. 5, a late editor of Jeremiah appended to the heading already in existence the words, "before that Pharaoh smote Gaza." He was wrong in so doing, but he only carried out, like many favourite modern preachers, what has been called the atomistic method of exegesis, by which a single verse is isolated from its context, and interpreted with total disregard of the rest of the passage.

But which Pharaoh did this editor mean? and when did he lay siege to Gaza? The

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general view is that he means Pharaoh-necho, who, according to Herodotus (ii. 159), first defeated "the Syrians at Magdolus," and then "made himself master of Cadytis, a large city of Syria." It is assumed that Magdolus is a mistake for Megiddo, and that Cadytis means Gaza; and the former supposition is probable enough (a similar confusion has been made by certain manuscripts at Matt. xv. 39; comp. the Authorized and Revised Versions); but the latter is rather doubtful. It is true that in iii. 5 Herodotus speaks of "the country from Phœnicia to the borders of the city Cadytis" as belonging to "the Palestine Syrians;" but is it not more probable that Herodotus mistook the position of *Jerusalem* (*Cadushta*, "the holy (city)," in Aramaic) than that he called Gaza "a city almost as large as Sardis"? Gaza was never called "the holy city;" Jerusalem was. Sir Gardner Wilkinson (*ap.* Rawlinson's 'Herodotus') takes a different view. According to him (and to Rashi long before) it was Pharaoh-hophra or Apries who captured Gaza. We know from Herodotus (ii. 161) that this king waged war with Phœnicia, which is, perhaps, to be taken in connection with the notice in ch. xxxvii. 5, 11, of the diversion created by an Egyptian army during the siege of Jerusalem. This hypothesis is to a certain extent confirmed by the mention of "Tyrus and Zidon" in ver. 4, but stands in much need of some direct historical confirmation.

Ver. 1.—**Against the Philistines**; rather, *concerning* (as usual in similar cases). **Before that Pharaoh**, etc. (see introduction to chapter).

Vers. 2—4.—Hostile bands advance from the north; horror seizes the Philistines.

Ver. 2.—**Waters rise up.** The prophets think in figures, and no figure is so familiar to them (alas for the unstable condition of those times!) as that of an overflowing torrent for an invading army (see on ch. xlvi. 8, and add to the parallel passages Isa. xxviii. 18; Ezek. xxvi. 19; Dan. xi. 10). **Out of the north.** To suppose that this refers to Pharaoh-necho returning from Carchemish seems forced and unnatural. If Necho conquered Gaza at the period supposed, it would be on his way to Carchemish, and not on his return. Besides, "the north" is the standing symbol for the home of the dreaded Assyrian and Babylonian foes (see on ch. i. 14). Isaiah had uttered a very similar prediction when the Assyrian hosts were sweeping through Palestine (xiv. 31). **An overflowing flood**; rather, *torrent*. The same phrase occurs in Isa. xxx. 28, where the "breath" of the angry God is described with this figurative expression. It is in autumn-time that the torrents of Palestine become dangerous, and water-courses, dry or almost dry in summer (comp. ch. xv. 18), become filled with a furiously rushing stream.

Ver. 3.—A fine specimen of Hebrew word-painting. **The rushing of his chariots.** "Rushing" has the sense of the German *rauschen*, to make a rustling, murmuring sound. It is used (but as the equivalent of a different Hebrew word) in the Authorized Version of Isa. xviii. 12, 13 of the confused sound made by an army in motion. In the present passage, the Hebrew word means something more definite than that in Isaiah, *l.c.*; it is the "crashing" of an earthquake, or (as here) the "rattling" of chariots. **The rumbling of his wheels.** "Rumbling" is a happy equivalent. The Hebrew (*hāmōn*) is the word referred to in the preceding note as meaning an indefinite confused sound. **The fathers shall not look back to their children**, etc. An awful picture, and still more effective in the concise language of the original. The Hebrew Scriptures excel (as still more strikingly, but with too great a want of moderation, does the Korân) in the sublime of terror. So overpowering shall the panic be that fathers will not even turn an eye to their helpless children. Observe, it is said "the fathers," not "the mothers." The picture is poetically finer than that in Deut. xxviii. 56, 57, because the shade of colouring is a degree softer. **Feebleness of hands.** A common expression for the enervation produced by extreme terror (see ch. vi. 24; Isa. xiii. 7; Ezek. vii. 17; Nah. ii. 11).

Ver. 4.—**The day that cometh**; rather, *the day that hath come* (i.e. shall have come). It is "the day of the Lord" that is meant, that revolutionary "shaking of all things" (to use Haggai's expression, ii. 21), as to which see further in note on ch. xlvi. 10. **To cut off . . . every helper that remaineth**; *i.e.* every ally on whom they could still reckon. This passage favours the view that the judgment upon the Philistines took place at the same time as that upon Tyre. Nebuchadnezzar's object was to isolate Tyre and Sidon as completely as possible. **The remnant.** The Philistines had suffered so much from repeated invasions as to be only a "remnant" of the once powerful nation which oppressed Israel (see on ch. xxv. 20). **The country of Caphtor.** Some would render "the coast-land of Caphtor," but the idea of "coast" seems to be a secondary one, derived in certain passages from the context. Properly speaking, it is a poetic synonym for "land,"

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and is generally applied to distant and (accidentally) maritime countries. "Caphtor" was understood by the old versions to be Cappadocia. But as the remains of the Cappadocian language point to a Persian origin of the population which spoke it, and as the Caphtorim originally came from Egypt, it is more plausible to suppose, with Ebers, that Caphtor was a coast district of North Egypt. Crete has also been thought of (comp. Amos ix. 7; Gen. x. 14; Deut. ii. 23).

Vers. 5—7.—The prophet changes his style. In ecstasy or imagination, he sees the calamity which he has foretold already come to pass. Philistia is not, indeed, altogether annihilated; it was not the will of God to make a full end as yet with any of the nations round about. But it is reduced to extremities, and fears the worst.

Ver. 5.—**Baldness.** A sign of the deepest sorrow (comp. on ch. xvi. 6). **Ashkelon is cut off.** Ruins of Ashkelon are still visible. "It is evident that the walls of the old city were built on a semicircular range of rocky hills, which ended in perpendicular cliffs of various heights on the seashore. Wherever nature failed, the weak places were strengthened by the help of earthworks or masonry. On the southern and south-eastern sides, the sand has penetrated the city by means of breaches in the walls, and every day it covers the old fortifications more and more, both within and without. The ancient towns alone rise distinctly, like rocky islands, out of the sea of sand. The ruins on the north are bordered by plantations of trees. They lie in such wild confusion that one might suppose that they were thrown down by an earthquake. There is no secure landing-place; the strip of sand at the foot of the western wall is covered at high tide, when the waves beat against the cliffs. Still J. G. Kinnear, in 1841, found some remains of a mole, and this discovery is confirmed by Schick [the able German architect now at Jerusalem]." Thus writes Dr. Guthe, in the Journal of the German Palestine Exploration Society (1880), remarking further that, in a few generations, the ruins of Ashkelon will be buried under the drifting sand. It is partly the sand-hills, partly the singular fragmentariness of the ruins of Ashkelon, which gives such an air of desolation to the scene, though, where the deluge of sand has not invaded, the gardens and orchards are luxuriant. Dr. W. M. Thomson, in the enlarged edition of 'The Land and the Book' (London, 1881, p. 173), observes that "the walls and towers must have been blown to pieces by powder, for not even earthquakes could throw these gigantic masses of masonry into such extraordinary attitudes. No site in this country has so deeply impressed my mind with sadness." **With the remnant of their valley.** "With" should rather be "even." "Their valley" means primarily the valley of Ashkelon; but this was not different from the valley or low-lying plain (more commonly called the *Shefélah*) of the other Philistian towns; and the whole phrase is an enigmatical, poetic way of saying "the still surviving population of Philistia." But this addition certainly weakens the passage, and leaves the second half of the verse abnormally short. It is far better to violate the Massoretic tradition, and attach "the remnant," etc., to the second verse-half. But "their valley" is still a rather feeble expression; a proper name is what we look for to make this clause correspond to those which have gone before. The Septuagint reads differently, for it renders καὶ τὰ κατάλοιπα Ἐνακείμ. We know from Josh. xi. 22 that some of the Anakim were left "in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod;" and in David's time the Philistines could still point to giants in their midst (1 Sam. xvii. 4; 2 Sam. xxi. 16—22), who, like the Anakim (Deut. ii. 20), are called in the Hebrew, Rephaim. It may be objected, indeed (as it is by Keil), that the Anakim would not be traceable so late as Jeremiah's time; but Jeremiah was presumably a learned man, and was as likely to call the Philistines Anakim, as an English poet to call his countrymen Britons. No one who has given special attention to the phenomena of the Hebrew text elsewhere can doubt that "their valley" is a corruption; the choice lies between the "Anakim" of the Septuagint and the plausible correction of a Jewish scholar (A. Krochmal), "Ekron." **How long wilt thou cut thyself?** Shall thy lamentation never cease? (comp. on ch. xvi. 6). The question is in appearance addressed to "the remnant" (personified as a woman), but in reality the judicial Providence who sends the calamity.

Ver. 6.—**O thou sword,** etc.; rather, *alas! thou sword of the Lord.* It is the mystic sword of which we have heard already (see on ch. xii. 10; xlvi. 10).

Ver. 7.—**The seashore.** So Ezekiel speaks of "the remnant of the seashore" (xxv. 16), referring to Philistia.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*The judgment of the Philistines.* I. A JUDGMENT ON THE ANCIENT ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD. They have long ceased to be a power; now they

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shall cease to have any national existence. They are but a remnant; even this is to be cut off. Gradually the spiritual foes of the Christian are reduced in power and number. Old sins and old temptations are slowly subdued. Some linger on till the end of life. But all shall be overthrown, even the last enemy, death.

II. AN OVERWHELMING JUDGMENT. It comes up like a flood; *i.e.* it is swift, and it spreads far and wide. Such is a characteristic of Divine judgments. 1. They may be long delayed, but when they appear they rush down as a flood. 2. They penetrate to secret hiding-places and flow to the most remote quarters, reaching those who would fain separate themselves from their companions in sin when they are forced to be also companions in suffering.

III. A DISTRESSING JUDGMENT. The Philistines suffer grief—they cry and howl; these people are also smitten with the paralysis of fear—"the fathers shall not look back to their children for feebleness of hands" (ver. 3). Some troubles can be endured and lived down by fortitude, by patient submission, or by the comforting resources of the inner life. But this is not possible with the judgments of Heaven. They are too terrific to be calmly endured. The inner sources of consolation are withheld. The soul is punished as well as the body. There is the bitterest drop in the cup of anguish. The soul will be tortured with shame, with remorse, with horror. That is hell.

IV. A DESTRUCTIVE JUDGMENT. "Baldness is come upon Gaza; Ashkelon is cut off." Great cities are overthrown, the ruins of them testifying to this day to the violence they have undergone. The end of the broad way is *destruction*. "The wages of sin is *death*." Whatever be the exact character of the destruction and death, the analogy of national judgment and the known deadening effects of sin upon the spiritual, the intellectual, and even the physical powers lead us to expect that the fearful fate of sin continued, unchecked, and unrepented of through all stages of chastisement will be some destroying process.

V. AN ENDURING JUDGMENT. "Alas! thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet?" (ver. 6). Philistia has never been restored. Some judgments appear to be irretrievable. All punishment must be sufficiently enduring to effect its end. The punishment of the next world is always referred to as terribly enduring, as partaking of the awful duration of æons. How long such vague, vast ages will last none can say. May it not be the fate of any of us to make the experiment!

Vers. 6, 7.—*The sword of the Lord.* I. THE TERROR OF MAN BEFORE THE SWORD OF THE LORD. (Ver. 6.) 1. *God wields a sword.* There are terrors in some of the doings of the God of love. "Our God is a consuming fire." It is foolish and wrong to blind ourselves to the stern side of God's government, and to represent him as almost soft and weak in his indulgence of his children. 2. God's sword may be seen in *earthly calamities.* It does not flash before us as when it was held by cherubim at the gates of Eden. It works in the form of natural calamities. It also makes use of human actions, wars, etc. Above the sword of man there glitters this terrible, irresistible sword. Thus calamities in this world are sent by God or overruled by God. 3. God's sword may be *restlessly active.* It is not displayed for one fearful moment and then sheathed. Often there comes blow upon blow. Thus Job cries out beneath the wearying strokes, "How long wilt thou not depart from me, nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle?" (Job vii. 19). 4. We *cannot see the reason* for the terrible work of the sword of the Lord. We cry out in dismay before it. From a human point of view it may appear cruel and relentless. 5. We may naturally *feel pity* for those who suffer from this terrible sword. It is right, too, that we should intercede for them if it be possible for the judgment of Heaven to be stayed.

II. THE DIVINE MISSION OF THE SWORD OF THE LORD. (Ver. 7.) 1. The wielding of the sword is *necessary.* "How *can* it be quiet?" There are moral necessities which even the Almighty God freely accepts. Justice must be done. Right must be established. Evil must be suppressed. The process may be painful, and such as God would not choose on its own account and can take no delight in. Yet for these high requirements, though his children suffer and his own heart is wrung with commiseration, he cannot sheathe the sword till its work is done. 2. The wielding of the sword is for a *good purpose.* The necessity is not blind and objectless. The sword has its mission. To us who are in the thick of the battle this may not be discernible. The dust and

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heat, the rush and noise and confusion, the mingled cries of triumph and pain, are all we can observe; the plan of the commander cannot be read through all the turmoil of the field. But he has a plan, and the whole battle is converging to it. 3. *The sword cannot be sheathed till its mission is accomplished.* The mission is more important than the temporary comfort arising out of the immediate quieting of the sword. If this were to be done before the end were obtained, where would be the use of all that was already suffered? If the sword is stayed before victory is won, every drop of blood spilt is wasted, every pang suffered is suffered in vain. If the discipline of life were to cease before its great purpose were accomplished, its earlier stages would be stultified. 4. *When the mission of the sword is accomplished the sword will be sheathed.* It is drawn for a definite object. "The Lord is a man of war" for a season and for a purpose, not by delight nor perpetually. He is essentially the God of peace. No one is more anxious to see the sword laid aside than he who wields it. His joy is in peace and in benediction. Judgment is temporary. The victory and rest that follow will be eternal.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 5.—*The sorrow of the ungodly.* The allusion is to a fashion common to the Philistines and other idolatrous nations in appealing to their gods. We perceive a similar tendency in the natural mind in its first moral concerns and spiritual troubles. It is the sorrow of the world to which, as to the Philippian jailor, the injunction has to be addressed, "Do thyself no harm." Notice—

I. THE PRINCIPLE IN HUMAN NATURE. It is that self-inflicted suffering or deprivation will be of spiritual advantage and secure Divine favour. This is the secret of penance, pilgrimages, monastic life, and asceticism in general. The saying, often uttered of losses or pains over which one has no control, "Ah, well! it will be set down to our credit!" witnesses to the same idea. Remorse is largely explained on the same principle.

II. THAT IT IS FOUNDED ON A MISCONCEPTION OF THE DIVINE NATURE. Baal was a cruel god—a huge abortion and monstrosity. Not less cruel are the ideas of God's character entertained by many reputedly religious persons. 1. *The gospel declares that "God is love."* Such self-inflictions are but folly, and have no religious value in view of this great truth. "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not . . . Lo, I come . . . I delight to do thy will, O my God" (Ps. xl. 6—8; Heb. x. 5—7); "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matt. ix. 13; cf. Hos. vi. 6); and "Wherewithal shall I come before the Lord, . . . he hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah vi. 6—8),—are the expressions of the spirit of true religion, which alone harmonizes with the doctrine of a loving God. 2. *God himself in the person of his Son has "borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."* The worship which is alone acceptable to the Father must begin with the recognition of this. There is a "godly sorrow," but its advantage consists in its moral influence on ourselves, making us hate sin and follow after righteousness, etc. 3. *Everything which ignores the merit of Christ's sufferings and God's revelation of himself must needs be hateful to him, and bring upon its authors his wrath and curse.*—M.

Vers. 6, 7.—*The sword of Jehovah.* I. A PERSONIFICATION OF DIVINE WRATH. "Sword of Jehovah" is an expression that seems to suggest the Philistines as the speakers; "for, though not bad Hebrew, it has a foreign sound, and makes the impression that the speakers attribute the sword raging against them only unwillingly and hesitatingly to Jehovah" (Naegelsbach). God in his true character is still unknown, but conscience witnesses to him as a dimly realized agent of moral recompense. Such language tells: 1. *How ceaseless and terrible is the judgment of the heathen world.* Ezekiel uses the same figure in relation to the Amorites (xxi. 30). "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked;" "Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God" (Ps. cxxxix. 19); "When they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them," etc. (1 Thess. v. 3). 2. *Of ignorance and moral distance from God.* He is only conceived of as a God of vengeance—an all but impersonal fate. 3.

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Of the helplessness and superstitious dread of sinners. An imperfect knowledge is eked out and distorted by a diseased imagination. All moral strength seems to have gone out of them.

II. EXPLAINED AND JUSTIFIED AS A DIVINE APPOINTMENT. At first the answer of the prophet appears little other than a repetition of the Philistines' thought; but it is far more. 1. *This is not blind fate, but judgment strictly meted out and determined.* 2. *It declares, in effect, that the wicked cannot be suffered to remain on the earth.* They must be subjects of continual and exterminating judgment. There is no escape. Is this so? Yes, so long as they remain impenitent and at a distance from him. Is it contradictory, then, for Zechariah to prophecy the *conversion* of the Philistines? The rightful end of judgment is mercy. The sinner is driven into the arms of the Divine love. Our helplessness prepares for the reception of his salvation.—M.

Ver. 7.—*The sword that cannot be quiet.* This chapter tells of another of the Gentile nations on whom the judgment of God was to come. These nations all lay in the march of the Babylonian armies, and were one after another overthrown. Philistia is represented as asking of the sword of the Lord, when it will be quiet, and the answer is, "How can it be quiet, when," etc.? (ver. 7). It reminds—

I. OF THE SWORD OF CONSCIENCE. The Lord hath given it a charge, and, though we may blunt it, we cannot perfectly quiet it (cf. Macbeth, Judas, and other conscience-haunted men).

II. OF THE SWORD OF SCRIPTURE. "The Word of the Lord is not bound. How men have sought to sheathe it in the scabbard, to hide and hold it there, so that they may go on unchecked in their own ways! But it has leapt forth in spite of them; and, in spite of pagan, Roman, and other persecutions, has asserted its supreme might."

III. OF THE SWORD OF THE DIVINE JUDGMENT AGAINST SIN. Sin and sorrow are eternally married, and can never be put asunder. Where one is the other is never far off, and never will be in this world or the next. But for every believer *Christ* has offered his own heart as a sheath for it. For such that sword is sheathed therein, and will be quiet there for ever.

"When Christ gave up the ghost
The Law was satisfied;
And now to its most rigorous claims
I answer, 'Jesus died.'"

C.

Vers. 6, 7.—*Apostrophe to the sword.* I. WHAT IS MEANT BY THE SWORD OF JEHOVAH. Any man, or army of men, or any inanimate thing even, may be as a sword in the hand of God. Men are restricted in their agents to injure and destroy, and well it is so, though in old and superstitious times some of them were believed to control the powers of nature so that they could raise winds and tempests. But God, with his real and complete control over all natural forces, can turn them against rebellious man whenever and to whatever extent it may be necessary. It is not a case of a strong arm and a weak weapon, or a weak arm and a strong weapon beyond what the arm can wield. God smites, and not imperfectly; nor does he need to smite twice.

II. WHAT IS SUGGESTED BY THE APOSTROPHE. 1. *The thought of God's enemies.* Here the Philistines are mentioned, so long the troublesome and jealous neighbours of Israel. But they are only types. There are still enemies numerous enough and active enough to keep the sword of God from lying quiet in its scabbard. Why were these Philistines reckoned enemies? Simply because of their wickedness. God is hostile to nothing but wickedness in man, and to that he is always hostile. There are Philistines still against whom a charge has to be given to the sword of God. And such must ever be destroyed, that is, not the men themselves must be destroyed, but that in them which selfishly upholds evil and profits by it. And even they themselves, if they continue the foolish war against God, must perish in the end. 2. *The thought of God's opposing activity to his enemies.* Wherever there is enmity to God, Divine opposition to it becomes manifest. Hard as it may be to fight for God, it is harder still to fight against him. In being on God's side against evil all the difficulties are at the beginning; in being on the evil side against God the difficulties, though they may

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look as nothing to start with, soon multiply and increase to the end. A charge is given to all God's servants to be resolute and uncompromising in their opposition to all wickedness. 3. *The thought of ultimate cessation of the sword's activity.* Surely the time is to come when the sword will lie quietly in the scabbard. He who came not to bring peace but a sword has peace for his ultimate aim. He will not say, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace; and when at last he will say, "Peace," we may be sure of the reality corresponding with the word.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

This prophecy is so full of repetitions that the question has naturally arisen whether the most prominent of these may not be due to interpolation. For instance: 1. Vers. 29—38 recur in Isa. xvi. 6—10; xv. 4, 5, 6; xvi. 12, 11; xv. 2, 3; not, indeed, without many peculiarities, and those peculiarities are so striking, and so little in harmony with Jeremiah's usual mode of using his predecessor's writings, that some have held that vers. 29—38 were inserted by one of Jeremiah's readers. 2. Vers. 43, 44 so closely resemble Isa. xxiv. 17, 18, and cohere so loosely with the context, that interpolation is a not unreasonable hypothesis. 3. Vers. 45, 46, which are omitted in the Septuagint, are evidently based on Numb. xxi. 28, 29. 4. Vers. 40, 41 closely resemble ch. xlix. 22; the portion corresponding to that passage is omitted in the Septuagint.

Vers. 1—8.—The prophet foresees the calamity of Moab, and the attendant confusion and dismay. Yes; flee, save your lives, if ye can; for your confidences have proved untrustworthy; there is no hope left.

Ver. 1.—**Against Moab**; rather, *concerning Moab.* **Nebo!** Not, of course, the mountain range referred to in Deut. xxxii. 49 and xxxiv. 1 as that from which Moses viewed the land destined for Israel, but a town in the neighbourhood, deriving its name, not from the mountain, but from the same old Semitic (and not merely Babylonian) deity. **Kiriathaim.** "The double city." A place of uncertain situation, but probably in the same district as Nebo; mentioned in Gen. xiv. 5, as the abode of the "terrible" aboriginal tribe called the Emim. **Is confounded**; rather, *is brought to shame* (as ch. xlvi. 24). **Misgab**; rather, *the fortress.* The connection shows that some definite fortress is intended, but it is difficult to say which. Graf thinks of Kir-heres (vers. 31, 36) or Kir-hareseth (another form of the same name; comp. Isa. xvi. 7; 2 Kings iii. 25), generally identified with Kir-Moab, the chief fortified town of the Moabites.

Ver. 2.—**There shall be no more praise of Moab**; rather, *Moab's glory* (or, *glorying*) *is no more* (comp. ver. 29). **In Heshbon they have devised evil,** etc. There is a word-play in the Hebrew, which may be reproduced thus: "In Plot-house they plot evil against it" (so J. F. Smith's Ewald). **Against it** (literally, *her*) means "against Moab." Heshbon was at the time an Ammonitish town (it had in days gone by been Amoritish, Numb. xxi. 26); see ch. xlix. 3; but was on the border of Moab. **O Madmen.** There seems to be again a word-play, which has been to some extent reproduced thus: "Thou shalt become still, O Still-house." The name Madmen does not occur again, though an allusion to it has been fancied in Isa. xxv. 10, where the Hebrew for "dunghill" is *madménah.*

Ver. 3.—**Horonaim.** This Moabite town was probably on the borders of Edom; hence, perhaps, "Sanballat the Horonite."

Ver. 4.—**Moab is destroyed.** The mention of Moab in the midst of towns is certainly surprising. We should expect Ar-Moab. **Her little ones.** The received text, as it stands, is untranslatable, and our choice lies between the correction suggested by the vowel-points, and the reading of the Septuagint and a few of the extant Hebrew manuscripts, "unto Zoar." In favour of the latter, which is adopted by Ewald and Graf, it may be urged that Zoar and Horonaim are mentioned together, not only in ver. 34, but also in Isa. xv. 5, which has evidently been imitated in the following verse. It is not quite clear what "her little ones" in the first-mentioned correction mean. Some think, the children; others, the poor; Hitzig prefers the small towns of Moab. On the site of "Zoar," see Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible,' but compare Canon Tristram in 'The Land of Moab.'

Ver. 5.—**For in the going up of Luhith,** etc. The verse is substantially taken from Isaiah (xv. 5), but with variations peculiar to this chapter. The most peculiar of these is that in the first verse-half, which is literally, *weeping goeth up* (not, *shall go up*)

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with weeping, which is explained by Dr. Payne Smith to mean "one set of weeping fugitives pressing close upon another." To the present commentator (as also to Delitzsch —see his note on Isa. xv. 5) there seems no reasonable doubt that *b'ki*, the word rendered "weeping," should rather be *bō*, "upon it," so that the passage will run, as in Isaiah, "for the going up of Luhith with weeping doth one go up it." Hitzig (whom for once we find agreeing with Delitzsch) remarks that the miswriting *b'ki* for *bō* may be easily accounted for by the fact that *ki*, "for," is the word which follows next. We have no right to ascribe to Jeremiah such an artificial and un-Hebraic an expression as that of the received text. Small as the matter may be in itself, it is not unimportant as suggesting to the *Old* Testament student a caution against the too unreserved adoption of the canon *Lectioni faciliori præstat ardua*. **In the going down of Horonaim.** An interesting variation from Isaiah. The older poet, less attentive to minutiæ, had said vaguely, "in the road to Horonaim;" by a slight change of expression, the younger and more reflective writer produces a striking antithesis between the ascent to the hill-town, and the descent to the hollow in which Horonaim ("double cavern") appears to have been situated. It is possible, however, that Jeremiah has preserved the original reading, and that "the road" in Isaiah, *l.c.*, is due to the carelessness of a scribe. **The enemies have heard a cry of destruction.** But why this reference to the enemies? The rendering, however, is ungrammatical. The text is, literally, *the enemies of the cry of destruction have they heard*. The prophecy in Isaiah omits "the enemies of," and has a different verb for "have they heard." Can the inserted words be an intrusion from the margin? The later scribes were accustomed to insert glosses in the margin on occasions where we should have thought them entirely unnecessary for the purpose of explanation. But then why "the enemies of"? It is an insoluble enigma.

Ver. 6.—**Flee, save your lives**; literally, *your souls*. The prophet's human feeling prompts him to this counsel; but he knows full well that a life of abject misery is the utmost that can be hoped for. **And be like the heath in the wilderness**; literally, *and (your souls) shall be like destitute ones in the wilderness*. Imagine the case of one who has been robbed of everything, and left alone in the desert; not less miserable is that of the Moabite fugitives. The word rendered "the heath" (*'arō'ēr*) is either miswritten for *'ar'ar*, which occurs in the sense of "destitute" in ch. xvii. 6 (see note), or also a rare plural form of the same word. The sense remains the same. It is tempting to see an allusion to one of the towns called Aroer (as in Isa. xvii. 2). But the only Aroer the prophet could be thinking of is that on the Arnon (Deut. ii. 36), which could not be described as "in the wilderness."

Ver. 7.—**In thy works**; *i.e.* either "in thy evil deeds" (comp. Isa. xxviii. 15) or "in thy idols" (frequently called "the work of men's hands," *e.g.* Deut. iv. 28, and sometimes simply "works," *e.g.* Isa. xli. 29; lvii. 12; comp. Isa. i. 31). **Chemosh.** In Numb. xxi. 29 Moab is called "people of Chĕmósh," the patron-god being the king and lord of his people. In accordance with the strictly localizing theory of the nature of deity, current among primitive nations, Chemósh is said to go into captivity together with his worshippers (comp. ch. xlix. 3; Amos i. 15). This helps us to understand the idolatry into which the Jews fell during the Exile (Isa. xlii. 17); they imagined that Jehovah himself was "in captivity," and restrained from putting forth his power on behalf of his worshippers. The text-reading is not Chemósh, but Chemíah; the latter form does not occur elsewhere, but has been thought to illustrate the name of the Hittite city Carchemish (the Hittites or their predecessors may have been worshippers of this deity), *i.e.* "castle of Chemósh."

Ver. 8.—**The valley . . . the plain.** The latter (Hebrew, *mishōr*) is the upland region which extends from the Jordan eastward of Jericho into the Arabian desert; in Numb. xxi. 20 it is called the "field" (*i.e.* "open country") of Moab. The former means that part of the Jordan valley which borders on this upland "plain" towards the west.

Vers. 9—16.—So sudden is the blow that Moab stands in need of wings to make good his escape. Were the human instrument to delay, the curse meant for Moab would come upon himself. Is a reason demanded? It is that Moab has long been in a state of morally perilous security, and requires to be thoroughly shaken and aroused, in order that he may discover the inability of Chemósh to help his worshippers.

Ver. 9.—**Give wings**, etc. Comp. ver. 28; also Isa. xvi. 2, where the fugitive Moabites are likened to "wandering birds."

Ver. 10.—**Deceitfully**; rather, *slackly, negligently*.

Ver. 11.—**Moab hath been at ease from his youth.** The "youth" of Moab dates from its subjugation of the aboriginal Emim (Deut. ii. 10). Since that event, though often at war, sometimes tributary and sometimes expelled from a part of the territory claimed by them (see the inscription on the Moabite Stone), yet they had

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never been disturbed in their ancestral homes to the south of the river Arnon. **He hath settled on his lees.** It was the custom to leave wine for a time on its lees or sediment, in order to heighten its strength and flavour (comp. Isa. xxv. 6). **Emptied from vessel to vessel.** Thevenot, an old traveller in Persia, remarks of the Shiraz wine that, after it is separated from the lees, it is apt to grow sour. "The wine is put into large earthen jars, each holding from ten or twelve to fourteen *carabas;* but when a jar has been opened, it must be emptied as soon as possible, and the wine put into bottles or *carabas*, otherwise it spoils and becomes sour" ('Voyages,' ii. 245, quoted by Lowth on Isa. xxv. 6). In the application of the figure, the "taste" of Moab means obviously the national character.

Ver. 12.—**Wanderers, that shall cause him to wander**; rather, *tilters, and they shall tilt him.* The earthen jars of which Thevenot speaks were doubtless similar to those of the Israelites. They would be tilted on one side, that the wine might run off clear from the dregs. **Their bottles**; rather, *flagons* or *pitchers* (of earthenware). The confusion of numbers and pronouns is remarkable. First, Moab collectively is spoken of as a wine-jar; then the Moabites individually as Moab's jars; last of all, the Moabites are spoken of as possessing "jars" (*i.e.* all the institutions, public and private, of the state and of society).

Ver. 13.—**Ashamed of Bethel**; *i.e.* of the golden calf or bull at Bethel, set up by Jeroboam I. as a symbol of the strong God, Jehovah. This idolatry was odious to the prophetic teachers of a nobler and more spiritual form of religion. They saw that the deity and the symbol were too much confounded, and that such a religion would not save its adherents from captivity and ruin (comp. Hos. x. 15; Amos iii. 14; v. 5, 6).

Ver. 14.—**We are mighty**; rather, *we are heroes.* The Hebrew is *gibbōrim*, the name of David's select warriors (2 Sam. xxiii. 8). The exclamation is designed to represent vividly to the mind the sinful vain-glory specially characteristic of Moab.

Ver. 15.—**Moab is spoiled, and gone up out of her cities.** The latter part of this clause in the Hebrew is extremely difficult; the Authorized Version is indefensible. It is even doubtful whether it can be translated at all consistently with grammar, though Hitzig, a good grammarian, has adopted the suggestion of Grotius, rendering, "and her cities have gone up," viz. in smoke, *i.e.* they have been burnt; comp. Judg. xx. 40, the end of which verse ought to run thus: "The whole city went up to heaven." But even if the verb in third masc. sing. be allowable after the plural noun, it is very harsh to give it such an interpretation, when the context says nothing about fire or smoke. J. D. Michaelis and Ewald, therefore, propose to change the vowel-points of the first word, rendering, "The spoiler of Moab and of her cities is gone up;" and Dr. Payne Smith inclines to follow them. We thus obtain a striking antithesis; the enemy has "gone up," and Moab's young men **are gone down**, *i.e.* are felled by murderous hands (comp. Isa. xxxiv. 7).

Ver. 16.—**The calamity of Moab**, etc. The form of the verse reminds us of Deut. xxxii. 35; Isa. xiii. 22.

Vers. 17—25.—How lamentable that such a glorious sceptre should be broken! But there is no remedy. Even Dibon, that highly honoured town, is disgraced. There is no hiding the sad fate of the Moabites; the crowds of fugitives sufficiently proclaim it. Judgment has been passed upon all the cities of Moab, a long roll of whose names is recited.

Ver. 17.—**All ye that are about him**; *i.e.* the neighbouring nations (comp. on ch. xlvi. 14). The invitation to condolence is not ironical, but in the deepest spirit of human sympathy, as in the parallel prophecy in Isaiah (see on Isa. xv. 5). **The strong staff**; *i.e.* the sceptre as an image of royal authority (comp. Ezek. xix. 11—14). **Rod**; as in Ps. cx. 2.

Ver. 18.—**Dibon**; now *Dibân*, one of the chief towns of Moab, on two adjacent hills, now covered with ruins (Tristram), in the plain of Medeba (Josh. xiii. 9), north of Aroer and the Arnon. Here the famous Moabite Stone (on which see Dr. Ginsburg's exhaustive monograph), with the inscription of King Mesha (2 Kings iii. 4), was found, which, after having been broken up and pieced together, has now found a resting-place in the Louvre. It is difficult to say to which Israelitish tribe Dibon was, strictly speaking, attached; for while in Josh. xiii. 17 it is given to Reuben, in Numb. xxxii. 34 and in the Moabite Stone (line 10) it is assigned to Gad. Apparently the Israelitish population fluctuated. Sometimes Gad was the most adventurous in occupying Moabitish territory, sometimes Reuben. On the phrase, **the daughter**, etc., see note on ch. xlvi. 19. The form of the first verse-half is modelled on Isa. xlvii. 1. **Sit in thirst.** The expression is unexampled, and it is possible that we should alter one of the vowel-points (which constitute no part of the Masoretic text), rendering, "sit in thirsty (ground)," *i.e.* the dust (comp. the parallel passage, Isa. xlvii. 1). Or there may be a less-used collateral form of the Hebrew

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for "thirsty" (*çāmē*). Canon Tristram speaks of the "waterless plain" of Dîbân ('Land of Moab,' p. 132). **Thy strong holds.** It appears from the Moabite Stone that Dibon was the centre of a district which was reckoned as belonging to it; so at least we may account for the phrase, "*all* Dibon was submissive" (line 28). Compare the phrase in Numb. xxi. 25, "Heshbon, and all the villages thereof" (comp. on ch. xlix. 2).

Ver. 19.—**The inhabitants of Aroer** will come out in eager expectation to meet the fugitives, and ask, **What hath happened?** (so the question should be rendered). There were several Aroers (one belonged to the Ammonites, Josh. xiii. 25), but as the enemy is driving the Moabites southward, the Aroer here intended can only be the town by the Arnon, which separated Moab proper first of all from the kingdom of the Amorites (Deut. iv. 48; Josh. xii. 2), and afterwards from the territory of the Israelites (Deut. ii. 36; iii. 12). The picture drawn in this verse is singularly appropriate to the site of Arnon, "just by the edge of the arterial highway of Moab," and commanding a complete view of the pass of the Arnon (Tristram, 'Land of Moab,' p. 132). There is the same variety of statement as to the Israelitish tribe to which Aroer belonged as in the case of Dibon (see ver. 18). Josh. xiii. 16 speaks in favour of Reuben; Numb. xxxii. 34 in favour of Gad.

Ver. 20.—The answer of the fugitives begins in the latter part of this verse, and, continues to ver. 24. **Confounded** ought, as usual, to be *brought to shame*. The address, **howl and cry**, which is in the feminine, refers to Moab, which has just before been spoken of in the feminine ("It is broken down," or rather, "she is dismayed," refers to Moab, not to Dibon). **In Arnon**; *i.e.* in the region of the Arnon; better, *beside Arnon* (comp. ch. xiii. 5, "by Euphrates").

Ver. 21.—**The plain country.** The *mîshôr* (see on ver. 8). **Holon** is not known from other sources. **Jahazah** (called Jahaz in ver. 34), according to Eusebius, still existed in his days, and lay between Medeba and Dibon. Like Heshbon and Dibon, it was claimed by the Reubenites (Josh. xiii. 18), and Mesha, in the famous inscription, states that the then King of Israel (Jehoram) "fortified Jahaz and dwelt in it, when he fought against me" (lines 18, 19). This was a great but only a temporary success, for Mesha adds that "Chemósh drove him out before me" (line 19). **Mephaath** was apparently near Jahaz, since it is always mentioned with that town (Josh. xiii. 18; xxi. 37; 1 Chron. vi. 79).

Ver. 22.—**Dibon** (see on ver. 18). **Nebo** (see on ver. 1). **Beth-diblathaim.** Mentioned here only. There is an Almon-diblathaim in Numb. xxxiii. 46, mentioned in connection with Dibon.

Ver. 23.—**Kiriathaim** (see on ver. 1). **Beth-gamul.** Nowhere else mentioned. **Beth-meon.** Called Baal-meon, Numb. xxxii. 38; Beth-baal-meon, Josh. xiii. 17. The extensive ruins of Ma'in are a short distance south of Heshbon.

Ver. 24.—**Kerioth.** Perhaps a synonym of Ar, the old capital of Moab (Isa. xv. 1). Hence in Amos ii. 2, "I will send a fire upon Moab, and it shall devour the palaces of Kerioth." **Bozrah.** The capital at one time of the Edomites (see ch. xlix. 13). The ownership of particular cities varied from time to time in this contested region. **Far or near**; *i.e.* towards the frontier or inland.

Vers. 26—35.—And what is Moab's crime? At an earlier point the prophet said that it was the callousness produced by long prosperity (ver. 11); but here another sin is mentioned—Moab's haughty contempt of Jehovah. "For this it deserves that its contempt should be thrown back upon itself, by its being made, like a drunken man, the scorn of all" (Ewald). The figure is, no doubt, a coarse one, but not unnatural in the oratory (we must put aside inspiration, which leaves the forms of speech untouched) of a rude people like the Jews. It occurs not unfrequently elsewhere; see especially Isa. xix. 14; Hab. ii. 15, 16; and, for milder examples of the figure, ch. xiii. 13 and xxv.

Ver. 26.—**Make ye him drunken.** The command is issued to the agents of the Divine wrath (comp. vers. 10, 21). **He magnified himself against the Lord.** Offences against Israel being also offences against Israel's God (see Jephthah's striking words in Judg. xi. 23, 24). **Shall wallow**; rather, *shall fall heavily* (literally, *shall clap*—a pregnant expression).

Ver. 27.—**Was he found among thieves?** for, etc.; rather, . . . *that, as often as thou speakest of him, thou waggest thy head.* What giveth thee the right to show such scorn and insolent triumph towards Israel, as if he were one who had been arrested in the very act of robbery (comp. ch. ii. 26)?

Ver. 28.—**Dwell in the rock.** Jeremiah probably thinks of the rocky defiles of the Arnon, so splendidly adapted for fugitives (see Consul Wetzstein's excursus to the third edition of Delitzsch's 'Jesaja;' he speaks of perpendicular walls of rock). **Like the dove** (*i.e.* the wild dove); comp. 'Iliad,' xxi. 493; 'Æneid,' v. 213.

Vers. 29, 30.—These verses are an expansion of Isa. xvi. 6. The boastfulness of

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Moab seems to have much impressed its Israelitish neighbours (comp. vers. 14, 27). It has been thought to be illustrated by the inscription on the Moabite Stone; but we must remember that all national monuments of this sort have a tendency to exaggeration.

Ver. 29.—**We have heard**; viz. the prophet and his countrymen.

Ver. 30.—**But it shall not be so**, etc. This is a case in which the accentuation must most decidedly be deviated from; it implies a faulty view of the word rendered in the Authorized Version, "his lies." But the rendering of our version is neither in itself tenable nor is it that intended by the accentuation. The rendering suggested by the latter is "his praters" (*i.e.* soothsayers), as the word, no doubt, must be taken in ch. l. 36; Isa. xliv. 25. But it is much more natural to render thus: "And the untruth of his pratings [*i.e.* of his boastings]; the untruth that they have wrought." In his words and in his works (and a word is equal to a work before the Divine Judge) Moab was essentially "untrue." Truth, in the Biblical sense, is to know and serve the true God.

Ver. 31.—Based upon Isa. xvi. 7. **Therefore.** Moab cannot escape the catastrophe, for his moral basis is utterly insecure. "Therefore," etc. **Will I howl.** It is at first sight strange that the prophet should speak thus sympathetically after the strong language in ver. 26. But the fact is that an inspired prophet has, as it were, a double personality. Sometimes his human feelings seem quite lost in the consciousness of his message; sometimes (and especially in Jeremiah) the natural, emotional life refuses to be thus restrained, and will have itself expressed. **All Moab**; *i.e.* Moab in all its districts, both north and south of the Arnon, or, at any rate, the fugitive populations. **Mine heart shall mourn.** The Authorized Version effaces one of the points of difference between Jeremiah and his original. The former leaves the subject indefinite—*one shall mourn.* **For the men of Kir-heres.** Isa. xvi. 7 has "for the raisin-cakes of Kir-heres" (*i.e.* for the cakes of pressed grapes, for which Kir-heres was specially famous)—a much more expressive phrase. Jeremiah, *or his scribe*, has changed *dshīshē* into *ānshē*, and the Targum and Septuagint have adopted this weak reading in Isaiah, *l.c.*

Ver. 32.—Shortened from Isa. xvi. 8, 9. **With the weeping of Jazer**; rather, *more than the weeping of Jazer.* This may mean either "more than I weep for Jazer" (which is favoured by the insertion of "for thee") or "more than Jazer weeps" (for the devastated vineyards of Sibmah); comp. Isaiah, *l.c.* The site of Jazer is placed by Seetzen between Ramoth (Ṣalt) and Heshbon, where some ruins called Ṣīr are now found. "Sibmah," according to St. Jerome, was not more than half a mile from Heshbon. King Mesha is thought to refer to it under the form Seran, miswritten for Seban (Sebam—so the form should be read—is an Old Testament version of the name; see Numb. xxxii. 3); see inscription on Moabite Stone, line 13. It appears to have been famous for its vineyards; and Seetzen tells us that grapes and raisins of specially good quality are still carried from the neighbouring Ṣalt to Jerusalem. **Thy plants are gone over the sea**; rather, *thy shoots passed over the sea.* The prophet here describes the extensive range of these vines. The northern limit of their culture was Jazer, its southern or western the further shore of "the sea," *i.e.* the Dead Sea. By a touch of poetic hyperbole the prophet traces the excellence of vines such as those of En-gedi (on the western bank of the Dead Sea) to a Moabitish origin. The reference to **the sea of Jazer** throws the whole passage into confusion. There is no lake or large pool at present to be found at Jazer, and the simplest explanation is that a scribe repeated the word "sea" by mistake. The true text will then be simply, "they reached unto Jazer." **The spoiler.** Isa. xvi. 9 has the more picturesque expression, "the shouting," *i.e.* the wild battle-cry.

Ver. 33.—Nearly identical with Isa. xvi. 10. **The plentiful field**; rather, *the garden-land*; i.e. land planted with "noble" plants, especially vines and olives. **Wine.** Here clearly sweet and unfermented wine (comp. Amos ix. 13, 14). **None shall tread with shouting.** This involves a very harsh construction of the Hebrew, and it is better (considering the numerous other errors of the same kind in the received text) to correct in accordance with Isa. xvi. 10, "the treader shall not tread." **Their shouting shall be no shouting.** "Shouting" (Hebrew, *hēdād*) may be taken in two senses: (1) the cheerful, musical cry with which "the treaders" pressed out the juice of the grapes (comp. ch. xxv. 30); (2) the wild cry (ch. li. 14) with which the enemy "fell upon the summer fruits and upon the vintage" (ver. 32), reducing the inhabitants to abject misery. In Isa. xvi. 9, 10 an allusion is made to this double meaning, and so, perhaps, it may be here ("There shall be shouting, but not that of the peaceful vintagers at their work"). Or, as others, we may explain "no shouting" as equivalent to "the opposite of shouting," *i.e.* either silence or lamentation (comp. Isa. x. 15, "not-wood" equivalent to "that which is specifically different from wood;" and xxxi. 3, "not God," equivalent to "the very opposite of Divine").

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Ver. 34.—Based on Isa. xv. 4—6. The cry of one town echoes to another, and is taken up afresh by its terrified inhabitants. Heshbon and Elealeh lay on eminences but a short distance apart, so that the shrill cry of lamentation would be heard far away in the south-east at Jahaz. Zoar and Horonaim both lay in the southern half of Moab (see on vers. 3, 4). **An heifer of three years old.** If this is the right rendering, the phrase is descriptive of Horonaim, which may, in the time of Jeremiah, have been a "virgin fortress." But the phrase, thus understood, comes in very oddly, and in the parallel passage in Isaiah it stands, not after Horonaim, but after Zoar; it hardly seems likely that there were two Gibraltars in Moab. Another rendering (Ewald, Keil) is, "(to) the third Eglath." This involves an allusion to the fact that there were other places in Moab called Eglath or Eglah, which has been rendered highly probable by Gesenius. **The waters also of Nimrim.** Canon Tristram speaks of the "plenteous brooks gushing from the lofty hills into the Ghor-en-Numeira." Consul Wetzstein, however, says that nature appears there under so unspeakably gloomy an aspect, that the identification is impossible. He proposes a site in the Wâdy So'êb, about fourteen miles east of the Jordan, which with its luxuriant meadows, covered with the flocks of the Bedouin, is probably suitable to the passages in Isaiah and Jeremiah (Excursus ii. in Delitzsch's 'Jesaja,' 4th edit., pp. 572, 573). So also Seetzen, who remarks that the lower part of this wâdy is still called Nahr Nimrin. In Josh. xiii. 27 a place called Beth-nimrah is mentioned as situated in the valley (*i.e.* the Jordan valley); no doubt this was in the wâdy referred to by the prophets. "The valley" seems to have been sometimes used in a wider signification, so as to include lateral valleys like that of Nimrim. The antiquity of the name is shown by its occurrence in the Annals of Thothmes III., who penetrated into the heart of Palestine, and, in the temple of Karnak, enumerates the cities which he conquered. From before B.C. 1600 to nearly A.D. 1900 this secluded valley has borne precisely the same name!

Ver. 35.—**Him that offereth in the high places**; rather, *him that goeth up to a high place*. Apparently a reminiscence of Isa. xv. 2 and xvi. 12. As Dr. Payne Smith well remarks, "The last stage of natural ruin is reached, when thus the rites of religion entirely cease."

Vers. 36—42.—The description of Moab's lamentations continued.

Ver. 36.—Based on Isa. xvi. 11; xv. 7. **Like pipes.** Isaiah has, "like the harp [or, 'lute']." The pipe, or flute, was specially used at funeral ceremonies (Matt. ix. 23; Luke vii. 32), and therefore, perhaps, seemed to Jeremiah more appropriate. **Because the riches**, etc. This is, no doubt, what we should have expected, but this is not what Jeremiah wrote; "because" should rather be *therefore*. Jeremiah simply transferred a clause (substantially at least) from his original, Isa. xv. 7, but into a context where it stands rather less naturally. The meaning of the words in Isaiah is that, the desolation being so great, the Moabites shall carry away as much of their goods as they can. In this new context, however, we can only explain this unexpected "therefore" by referring to a habit of the Israelitish mind by which that which contributed to a result was regarded as worked purposely for that result. Good instances of this habit are Gen. xviii. 5; Ps. xlv. 3; li. 6; comp. Winer's 'New Testament Grammar' (Clark), pp. 573, 574, especially note 1 on p. 574, though the idiom also occurs in Old Testament passages in which the religious view of life is hardly traceable.

Vers. 37, 38 (first part).—Based on Isa. xv. 2 (latter part), 3 (first part). On the primitive Arabic, Egyptian, and Hebrew custom of cutting off the hair, see on ch. xvi. 6, and comp. Herod., ii. 36. **Clipped.** The difference from the word in Isaiah is so slight that it may easily have arisen from a copyist. The meaning is virtually the same. **Cuttings.** So of Philistia (ch. xlvii. 5); see on ch. xvi. 6.

Ver. 38.—**Lamentation generally**; literally, *all of it is lamentation*; i.e. nothing else is to be heard. **Like a vessel**, etc. For this figure, see on ch. xxii. 28 (Jeremiah repeats himself).

Ver. 39.—**They shall howl**, saying, etc.; rather, *How is it dismayed! (how) they wail! How hath Moab turned the back ashamed! Yea, Moab becometh*, etc.

Vers. 40, 41.—The Septuagint has a shorter form (see introduction to chapter).

Ver. 40.—**He shall fly as an eagle**; rather, *he shall swoop* (same word and figure in Deut. xxviii. 49). The subject is not named, but (as in ch. xlvi. 18) is Nebuchadnezzar.

Ver. 41.—**Kerioth is taken.** Kerioth has been already mentioned in ver. 24 (see note). Another possible rendering is, *The cities are taken*, and this certainly agrees better with the parallel line. But a plural of *kiryâh*, a city, does not occur elsewhere. If the identification of Kerioth with Ar-moab, the capital of Moab, be accepted (see on ver. 24), the equalization of Kerioth and "the strong holds" seems to be a stumbling-block. **Strong holds**; or, *mountain fastnesses* (ch. li. 30).

Vers. 43—47.—Hence, as the final result, escape is absolutely impossible, for one danger succeeds another in an endless series.

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The last and greatest danger besets those who seek refuge behind the strong fortifications of Heshbon. It is from this very city that the hottest fire of the enemy breaks forth. Chemósh has not saved his people; and yet there is hope for Moab in the future.

Ver. 43.—**Fear, and the pit, and the snare.** An alliteration in the Hebrew, which occurs again in Isa. xxiv. 17. In German it can be represented better than in English—*e.g.* by Hitzig's "grauen, graben, garn." All primitive poetry delights in such alliterations.

Ver. 45.—Apparently quoted from memory from Numb. xxi. 28; xxiv. 17, except the first clause; the application, however, is peculiar to this passage. **They that fled,** etc.; rather, *The fugitives stand without strength in the shadow of Heshbon.* There is a difficulty here, for, according to ver. 2, the hostile raid into Moab started from Heshbon. Surely the fugitives would not think of escaping northwards, much less would they be able to elude the vigilance of the foe and reach Heshbon. But it is not surprising that the author of so long a poem should now and then make a slip; the author of the Book of Job is sometimes inconsistent with the Prologue, and ver. 2 is as far away from the passage before us as the Prologue of Job is from Job xix. 18. Nor can we be absolutely certain that our prophecy is exactly as Jeremiah wrote it. **Shall come forth**; rather, *hath come forth* (or, *cometh forth*), **From the midst of Sihon.** Sihon being, perhaps, regarded as the leader and representative of his warriors. **The corner of Moab**; rather, *the sides* (literally, *side*, used collectively) *of Moab.* **The tumultuous ones**; literally, *sons of tumult*, a poetical phrase for warriors. The prophet has substituted the more common word *shāōn* for its synonym *shēth.*

Ver. 46.—Based on Numb. xxi. 29. The chief difference is in the second half of the verse, in which the bold expression of Chemósh "giving his sons and his daughters into captivity" is changed for a mere ordinary and prosaic phrase.

Ver. 47.—On the phraseology of this verse (omitted in the Septuagint), see on ch. xxix. 14; xxiii. 20, and on the brighter prospect held out for Moab, see the analogies given in note on ch. xlvi. 26. **Thus far is the judgment of Moab** is clearly an editor's note (comp. ch. li. 64). "Judgment" as in ver. 21.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—47.—*The judgment of Moab.* As the prophet's "eye in a fine frenzy rolling" sees the flood of the Chaldean invasion sweeping over one after another of the nations, his words flash out in pictures full of energy and fire. If this world's calamities are thus terrible, how shall the awful realities of eternity be contemplated? Why should some of us be so shocked at the strong language of preachers? Strange and fanatical as it may appear, the fury of a Knox is more consonant with much of life and revelation than the complacent mildness of an Addison. Visions of judgment are no topics for graceful moral essays. Nevertheless, however hot the language may be, it must not descend to mere wild, whirling words; it must be characteristic and truthful. The succession of pictures of approaching judgment which Jeremiah draws are not monotonous repetitions of the same description. They are definite and distinctively applicable to the respective subjects of them. Let us observe the special features of the judgment of Moab.

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE PEOPLE. The grounds of the judgment are given in the revelation of the sins of Moab. The head and front of her offence is *pride* (*e.g.* ver. 29). Other characteristics are closely related, viz.: (1) *trust in wealth and material resources* (ver. 7); (2) *self-indulgent ease* (ver. 11); (3) *boastfulness* (ver. 14); (4) *scorn* (ver. 27); (5) *defiance of Heaven* (ver. 26). Such a catalogue of offences is peculiarly hateful to God. Sins of appetite and passion are partly the result of weakness. The culpability of them is less than that of the intellectual and spiritual sins by all the weight of temptations which arise out of the natural constitution of man. For such sins as those of Moab there is no excuse. They are nearest to the most diabolical wickedness. Adam fell by a sin of appetite; Satan by a sin of spiritual pride.

II. THE NATURE OF THEIR DOOM. 1. *Destruction.* (Ver. 4.) The general doom of all the nations. This is the leading form of the evil fruits of sin. 2. *Shame and humiliation.* (Ver. 13.) "Moab also shall wallow in his vomit" (ver. 26). What a terrible anti-climax from the pride and haughtiness which are the chief characteristics of this people! 3. *Derision.* Moab had mocked at Israel, now "he also shall be in derision" (ver. 26). Thus scorn is rebuked with scorn, and the mocker is mocked. 4. *Gloom and grief.* (Ver. 33.) The ease and self-complacency which had characterized Moab are

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exchanged for their opposites. 5. *Poverty.* "The riches that he hath gotten are perished" (ver. 36). Moab had trusted in wealth. His punishment will consist in part in the loss of this. Finally, to Moab, as to other nations, there is promised an ultimate restoration. "Yet will I restore the prosperity of Moab in the latter days, saith the Lord" (ver. 47). Most beautifully does this one verse close the terrible vision of judgment, like one ray of light breaking through the dense black thunder-clouds and promising the dawn of a new day of life and gladness. Even to a heathen people the promise is made, and by the mouth of a Hebrew prophet. Who, then, shall dare to set limits to the future restoring power of the grace of God?

Ver. 7.—*The dangers of riches.* Riches are not evil things in themselves. The gifts of God in nature, or the fruits of man's industry, they are valuable just because they have in them some serviceableness for human wants. Money is not the root of all evil, but the love of it (1 Tim. vi. 10). It is they who trust in riches who find it impossible to enter into the kingdom of God (Mark x. 24). But riches are snares, and the possessor of them had need beware of the dangers they necessarily bring. When the servant becomes a god the degraded worshipper is on the road to ruin. Let us consider some of the dangers of riches.

I. A DANGER OF DELUSIVE TRUST. The wealthy man is likely to think his riches will do more for him than it is in their power to do. He finds that money brings a number and variety of comforts and helps him out of many a difficulty. He is in danger of looking upon it as omnipotent. But money will not buy the choicest blessings. It will not purchase friends, nor peace of mind, nor spiritual blessedness here, nor the heavenly inheritance hereafter. To trust to riches for these things is to miss them. Yet they are the truest treasures. The poor man who seeks them aright, not being allured by the rich man's peculiar temptations, may step in first; and so Dives may come to envy Lazarus.

II. A DANGER OF WORLDLINESS. Rich Moab lives at her ease (ver. 11). A wealthy man is tempted to be satisfied with his possessions. The earth is very fair to him. Possibly he is in the land of the lotus-eaters, "where it is always afternoon." He is thus in danger of caring only for this world, and making no provision for the better world. For he may value his earthly jewels so much as not to care to search after the pearl of great price, or to be unwilling to make any sacrifice in order to purchase it. He tends to become so engrossed with material things as to lose all appetite for and all perception of spiritual things. His treasure is on earth, and his heart is there also. Thus he loses the solid, lasting possessions of eternity while grasping at the shadowy treasures of time.

III. A DANGER OF PRIDE. Rich Moab is proud. The wealthy man is tempted to transfer his high estimation of his possessions to himself. Because he has much he is induced to think that he is much, and the world too often urges him to this mistake by its despicable sycophancy to mere money. When will people learn to value men by their characters and not by their purses? If pride has any valid excuse for existence, this must be found in the true nature of a man and his own personal excellences. Before God we are judged solely by what we are. Our possessions will only aggravate our guilt if they have been abused, for they will be regarded as talents to be accounted for, never as merits to secure us any reward. Therefore the pride of the rich man may be his ruin.

Ver. 10.—*Slack service.* "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord *slackly*." These words refer immediately to the terrible work of destruction. We shudder at hearing so fearful a curse; but we should remember that, if the slaughter were believed to be in accordance with God's will, and therefore also believed to be right and necessary, there could be no excuse for neglecting it. We may derive from this extreme instance a most forcible argument against slack service. If such slackness could appear cursed to the Jew under the most trying circumstances, when pity and all humane instincts cried out against the work, how much more guilty is it in the Christian work of love!

I. INDICATIONS OF SLACK SERVICE. 1. *Negative goodness.* Great care to avoid all forms of impurity may be found together with a reluctance to make any sacrifice or put forth any exertion. 2. *Conventionalism.* A man follows in the rut of his predecessors, evinces

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no originality, has no device with which to meet an emergency, never inquires into the suitability of his work to its end, never thinks of improving it, sticks to old ways when the old objects of them are obsolete, cannot break up new ground though new requirements call him to it. 3. *Working at half-power.* What service is rendered does not come up to the level of requirement nor to the measure of ability. It is done in a slow, dreamy style. 4. *Failure before difficulty.* The molehill is magnified into a mountain. The opposition, which is the spur to enthusiasm, puts a complete stop to slack service.

II. CAUSES OF SLACK SERVICE. 1. *Worldliness.* The clay of selfishness is mingled with the strong metal of devotion. A man would serve God and mammon. He tries to do the work of God with one hand, while he advances his own interest with the other. But no work for God is acceptable which is not done with both hands. 2. *Unbelief.* This paralyzes much of our work—more, I am persuaded, than we are ready to admit. The God served is a shadowy Being, and no wonder the service is faint and feeble. 3. *Want of devotion.* The service of the hands is given without the love of the heart. This mechanical work is a poor, spiritless thing. It is love and love only that can inspire a service of unwearying energy. 4. *Cowardice.* There is a fear to do difficult and dangerous work. We pity this for its weakness. We should condemn it as wicked. Should not the servant of Christ be willing to suffer all torments and die for his Lord who suffered and died for him? "Be thou faithful unto *death*." 5. *Mere indolence.* Indolence may be partly constitutional, as in persons of lethargic temperament. Some men are habitually tardy and dilatory. They should learn to resist these tendencies as temptations to fatal unfaithfulness.

III. EVILS OF SLACK SERVICE. It is no slight failure to be gently rebuked. The curse of God lies upon it. "*Cursed* be he," etc. 1. It is very *wicked.* We are God's servants, and bound by ties of nature and of gratitude. 2. It is likely to be *fruitless.* Negligence in work may imperil the whole results of it. If the ship is carelessly steered it may be wrecked. 3. It *injures the man* who works negligently. Our manner of work reacts upon ourselves. Indifferent service produces a low tone of life, coldness, lethargy, unspirituality.

IV. CALLS TO BETTER SERVICE. 1. From the *curse of slack service.* This curse is a solemn warning. The evils that necessitate it should terrify us from incurring it. 2. From the *obligations of duty.* "We are not our own; we are bought with a price." When we do our best we are unprofitable servants. Solemn voices of time and eternity bid us "work while it is day." "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." 3. From the *need of the world.* Our Christian service is no profitless treadmill drudgery. It is for the good of mankind. The call in the text was to execute wrath; ours is to do deeds of mercy. The world in its darkness, its misery, its sin, cries loud for the Christian mission of consolation and redemption. Can we sleep while such calls pierce our ears? 4. From the *constraining love of Christ.* He died for us; he only asks that we shall live for him. But the least we can do is to live faithfully, earnestly, and devotedly, serving the Saviour with all earnest zeal. 5. From the *heavenly reward* (Heb. xii. 1, 2).

Ver. 11.—"*Wine on the lees.*" This is a figure of a people left for ages in a condition of ease. They are like wine settled on its lees, unchanged and unpurified.

I. IT IS BAD FOR A PEOPLE TO REMAIN LONG IN A CONDITION OF EASE. 1. *Evil is not purged out.* The wine is still on its lees. In times of quiet we settle down contented with ourselves as well as with our surroundings. We say—Why disturb the air with cries for change while all is still and calm and dreamy as a summer noon? The old ruin stands unshaken in the fair weather. But presently the tempest rises, the wind howls, and the broken walls tremble to their foundations. Then we see that repairs must be executed or a new building erected. 2. *Progress in good is stayed.* Wine should improve with keeping. But of this wine it is said, "His taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed." Progress needs the stimulus of conflict. Trouble promotes reflection and urges to improved action in the future. "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you!" (Luke vi. 26). 3. *Corruption and decay are induced.* Ease means stagnation, and stagnation decomposition. If the vital functions are arrested, the body will not remain like a marble statue. Very soon other actions are set up,

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and the quiet of death gives place to a horrible scene of rapid corruption. The stagnant soul becomes the dead soul, and this a mass of moral rottenness.

II. THE EVILS OF A CONDITION OF EASE BELONG TO ALL CLASSES OF LIFE. 1. The *nation.* Moab had lived for ages amongst her hills and fertile fields beyond the surging tide of the world's restless changes which swept along the western side of the Jordan between Egypt and the northern nations. She was not the better for this isolation. Wars, invasions, revolutions, turn out to be ultimately serviceable to the cause of human progress. 2. The *Church.* The Middle Ages, when the Church was all-powerful and at ease, were the dark ages of Christendom. The disturbance of the Reformation was a new birth to the Church, in the good of which even the Roman Catholics shared by the stimulus it brought to zeal and the check it put on the paganizing spirit prevalent in Italy in the fifteenth century. 3. The *individual Christian.* In times of ease we tend to become worldly, and our devotion cools. Trouble drives us to prayer and wakens the deeper instincts of the soul (Heb. xii. 11).

Ver. 29.—*Pride.* With accumulated phrases emphasis is laid upon this leading sin of Moab, a sin which is condemned throughout Scripture as one of great wickedness.

I. THE NATURE OF PRIDE. Pride is a passion rising out of an inordinate opinion of our own worthiness. It is to be distinguished from vanity. Vanity is eager for the admiration of others, though, perhaps, in its own heart conscious of possessing but little to deserve it. But pride is inwardly elated with the feeling of self-importance, and may be quite indifferent to the opinion of the world. Indeed, the height of pride is to scorn the admiration as much as the hatred of other men, to look down upon the "dim multitude" as in all respects beneath contempt. Vanity craves social position; pride is essentially lonely. (Nevertheless we must beware of the common injustice of mistaking all reserve for pride; this may arise from constitutional habit, from sensitiveness, even from extreme humility.) Vanity smiles with the desire of pleasing; pride frowns in haughty independence. It is possible, however, for a man to have a very high opinion of his own powers, importance, etc., without much pride. For pride is not a mere conviction of the great worth of one's self, it is an emotion, a passion, a disposition to dwell on one's own merits and make idols of them.

II. THE SINFULNESS OF PRIDE. Why is this so strongly condemned in Scripture? so hateful to God? Consider how it must appear in his sight. We are all his helpless children; "we have erred and strayed from his ways like lost sheep;" before him we are foul with sin, humiliated with failure; our best works are poor and imperfect; in free grace he spares, endures, pardons. Where, then, is there ground for pride? Pride is the denial of guilt, the assumption that the good we receive from God is deserved; it is, therefore, a gross presumption, an evidence of base ingratitude, a proof of self-will that refuses to humble itself before the good and holy Father.

III. THE INJURIOUS EFFECTS OF PRIDE. 1. *It blinds us to our own danger.* It assumes that all must be well. But the assumption does not alter facts. It only aggravates the danger by preventing us from taking precautions against it. Moab was not saved in the general overthrow of the nations for all her pride. Humility sees the stumbling-block in the path, but pride holds its head so high as never to observe it, and so falls over it (Prov. xvi. 18). 2. *It prevents us from securing our own highest good.* This can only be given by the mercy of God, and he can only bestow it on the humble, the contrite, the submissive. The proud man bars his own heart against the incoming of the grace of God. 3. *It hinders the good work of life.* It is directly opposed to charity; it is incongruous with that spirit of mutual concession and co-operation which is required in the service of life. Thus pride often wastes those very powers on the existence of which it stands. To conquer pride let us look at our lives in the light of the life of the meek and humble Jesus of Nazareth.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 11—13.—*The ease of Moab.* A figure: wine-casks long undisturbed, whose contents improve and mellow in their taste, at length tilted by the coopers so that the wine is spilled.

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I. WORLDLY PROSPERITY IS OFTEN VERY GREAT AND UNINTERRUPTED. 1. *Frequently remarked.* Heathen nations, whose very backwardness and barbarism have isolated them from the disturbing stream of the world's life; and empires that seem to be based upon irreligion and wrong, and that are nevertheless in the van of civilization. The men who make the colossal fortunes of modern times are not, as a rule, distinguished for their religious virtues. Sins that immediately destroy some are committed with impunity by others. Many of the most ancient and lucrative vested interests of the world are owned by persons without moral character, and are prostituted to the basest purposes. 2. *The moral perplexity of this.* When wealth and influence almost phenomenally great are thus acquired and used, they cannot fail to trouble the minds of good men. The difficulties of a moral and religious life are so great that such a spectacle tempts and saddens. Israel had been afflicted from her youth (Ps. cxxix. 1—3), whilst Moab was at ease. David was envious when he saw the prosperity of the wicked (Ps. lxxiii. 3).

II. SINNERS ARE THEREBY CONFIRMED IN THEIR EVIL HABITS AND BELIEFS. The material wealth and secular position of Moab were doubtless greatly advanced by this long security, and a kind of prestige attached to him amongst neighbouring nations. His customs gradually acquired a fixed and immovable authority. The national character, with all its inherent vices, developed a strong individuality: "His taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed." One trait of this character, for which Moab was notorious and intolerable, was his pride (ver. 29). His attachment to idolatry was also intense; his inhabitants were the "people of Chemosh" (ver. 46). To add to the cup of his transgression, he "magnified himself against the Lord" (ver. 42). All this is in strict analogy with what may be observed anywhere under similar circumstances. National pride grows with impunity and conquest; and prejudice strengthens itself in the apparent success of its policy of life and the blessing that seems to attach to its religious observances. Israel was a derision to Moab (ver. 27).

III. BUT THEIR POSITION IS INSECURE, AND DESTRUCTION, THOUGH DELAYED, WILL BE THE MORE CERTAIN AND COMPLETE. The uncertainty of worldly prosperity is represented frequently and under many figures in Holy Writ. It is "that which moth and rust corrupt, and thieves steal;" it "takes to itself wings and flies away;" the whole life of which it is the material embodiment, is "even as a vapour, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (Jas. iv. 14). Here the metaphor is that of a tilted vessel. There will come a day when the cup of a nation's or individual's iniquity will be full; then will they be as Sodom and Gomorrah, whose cry was great and their sin very grievous (Gen. xix. 20). It is just this confidence, born of long impunity, that becomes intolerable to God and provokes his wrath. The rich fool (Luke xii. 16—21).—M.

Ver. 13.—*Betrayed by their gods.* This statement, as it is more especially from the religious standpoint, is a generalization of the cause of Moab's ruin, full of spiritual insight and sagacity. It is in such directions as these we are to seek for the reasons of human success or failure; everything else is but superficial.

THE TRUE CAUSES OF HUMAN SUCCESS OR FAILURE, HAPPINESS OR MISERY, ARE OF A MORAL OR SPIRITUAL KIND. We do not know the exact nature of the Chemosh-worship of Moab, but it is evident that, like other idolatries, it favoured materialism and the gratification of passion (ver. 7). The idol was the centre and representative of the whole life of the people. 1. *Material circumstances are in themselves indifferent towards the achievement of national or individual greatness, but trust in material circumstances is an invariable precursor of ruin.* It is the virtues that are the true bulwarks of a people. "If all the historians who record the ultimate extinction of nations were inspired of God to give the true reasons of their fall, we should often meet this testimony: 'Perished of national pride, producing contempt of God and of fundamental morality'" (Cowles); Prov. xiv. 34. 2. *The chief object of desire to any one is his ruler and destiny.* The god is the embodiment of all the sentiments and passions associated with its worship; the leading desire attracts towards itself and assimilates all others. It gradually but inevitably becomes his god. His whole life will henceforth take its complexion and direction from it. He conceives it to be the best and to be able to secure for him all that is desirable. From this we see: (1) *The peril of idolatry.* Pandering to the worst and most selfish passions, it blinds and

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infatuates its votaries and leads them eventually to their ruin. (2) *The importance of a true worship.* It cultures the nature according to its essential principles, and secures the supremacy of the moral and spiritual. And all true guidance, help, and comfort are afforded in answer to believing prayer.—M.

Ver. 6.—"*The heath in the wilderness.*" Such will the sinner be; for, like it, he will be: 1. *Barren.* No rich, strength-sustaining fruit does the heath bear. A mere hard berry. The camel and the ass may browse thereupon, but it is no food for man. "Can men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" And thus barren of good is the sinner. 2. *Unlovely.* There is no form nor beauty about the heath; a stunted, misshapen shrub. Its wood can be used for no manufacture. It is fit only to be burned. And when our eyes are opened to see things as they are, sin and the sinner will appear in all moral unloveliness; all present outward charm gone, and only their evil deformity seen. 3. *Alone.* Surrounded by drear expanse of sand; no companion trees to form it into a grove or a verdant mass of plant-life. And so will the sinner be one day. Christ goes with the believer down the dark valley, but the sinner goes forth alone. He stands at the bar of God with no advocate. None of all his old companions can redeem his soul or give to God a ransom for him. Alone; helpless. 4. *The gracious influences of Heaven do him no good.* The dew and the rain, the sun's warmth, come upon it; but it remains the unlovely, solitary, barren thing it ever was. So the impenitent man is visited by the influences of Heaven, the pleading of the Spirit, the varied means of grace; but they avail him not. 5. *Soon to perish.* The driving sand, the scorching heat, the browsing camel, the encampment fire, all threaten its life, and by one or other of them it soon perishes. And they who are like to it are never safe. "How are they destroyed as in a moment!" *Conclusion.* But the godly are not so. "He shall be like a tree planted by," etc. (Ps. i.).—C.

Ver. 10.—*Doing the work of the Lord deceitfully.* We observe—

I. THE WORK OF THE LORD IS OF VARIED KINDS. Here it has reference to the vengeance to be taken on Moab, and denounces a curse on that soldier who failed to do his duty in the most thorough and terrible manner. No pity, no motive of any kind, was to lead them to spare the doomed nation. But whilst such dread work may be at times the work of the Lord, the expression more commonly points to that which is spiritual, and tends to man's highest good. In the apostolic Epistles we have constant reference to the work of the Lord in this happier sense.

II. BUT THERE IS PERIL, WHATEVER THE WORK BE, OF DOING IT DECEITFULLY. Now, the work of the Lord is done deceitfully: 1. *When it is not done thoroughly.* When we shirk our work; do no more than we can help; get away from it as fast as we can. And how much of the "work" is thus done! Alas that it should be so! Evidently counted a drudgery rather than a delight. Do we not all know that there is danger of our thus working? 2. *When it is not done sincerely.* How varied and how questionable often the motive which leads men to engage in the work of the Lord!—custom, ostentation, fear of reproach, sting of conscience, hope of gain, fashion, etc. These and such as these may crowd out the only right and sincere motive—the love of Christ. All others make us more or less hypocrites, and can find no acceptance of the Lord in the great day. But is there no peril from such motives? We know there is. 3. *When it is not done earnestly.* When our heart is not in our work. When it is laid hold of not, as it should be, "with both hands earnestly," but, as it were, with one of the fingers. Some thus work; others as with one hand; others, indeed, with both hands, but slowly, loosely, not earnestly. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Only such as obey that Word are sincere workers. 4. *When it is done hypocritically.* In the days of sore persecution there was but little peril of this; but when and where religion goes, as it is said, in silver slippers, there is real peril of men taking up with the Lord's work in order to further, not the work of the Lord, but their own poor worldly well-being. What they do is all a pretence, a kind of deception. God keep us all therefrom! For note—

III. THE SEVERITY WITH WHICH THE LORD LOOKS UPON HIS WORK DONE DECEITFULLY. "Cursed be he," etc. (ver. 10). Now, wherefore this severity? 1. *It is an insult to God.* It is as good as saying to him that his work does not deserve true

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labour; that it is of so little importance that anything will do for it—the parings of your time, your energy, your thought, your means, your strength. What could be a greater affront to God? 2. *The work is so great and urgent* that it is traitorous thus to engage in it. What do we say of the watchman sleeping at his post (cf. Ezek. xxxiii.)? of all who betray their trust or neglect it? 3. *Such deceitfulness is contagious.* How many a young servant of Christ is checked and chilled by the evil influence of professed servants of Christ like himself, but older, less fervent, and who are guilty of that which is here denounced! Such demoralize many in the army of the Lord. 4. *It renders the work itself far more difficult.* For the world sees clearly and judges keenly those who say they do the work of the Lord. They know what that work is, what it professes to aim at, what the interests involved in it. But they who do that work deceitfully cause men to laugh at all such work, to disbelieve all its claims, and to decline more stoutly than ever to surrender their hearts to it. 5. *Such deceivers harden their own hearts*, and steep themselves in a fatal slumber, from which there is no waking. Never has Satan a firmer hold on a man than when he can get him to do the work of the Lord deceitfully. The man is fully persuaded that he is all right, and dies with a lie in his right hand, and is not undeceived till, to his awful amazement, he hears the Lord say to him and to all such, "I never knew *you*; depart from me." That thus it may not be with us, note—

IV. OUR SAFEGUARDS AGAINST SUCH SIN. 1. Solemn recollection and pondering of God's severe anger against it. 2. And chiefly by continually seeking and cherishing in your hearts that love of Christ which the Holy Spirit creates and maintains there, and which alone, but ever, makes all our work sincere, acceptable, effectual, and true.—C.

Ver. 11.—*Much ease, much peril.* "There is a reference here to wine, or to the process by which it is prepared and finished. It is first expressed from the grape, when it is a thick discoloured fluid or juice. It is then fermented, passing through a process that separates the impurities and settles them as lees at the bottom. Standing thus upon its lees or dregs in some large tun or vat, it is not further improved. A gross and coarse flavour remains, and the scent of the feculent matter stays by and becomes fastened, as it were, in the body of the wine itself. To separate this and so to soften or refine the quality, it is now decantered or drawn off into separate jars or skins. After a while this is done again and then again; and so, being emptied from vessel to vessel, the last remains of the lees or sediment are finally cleared, the crude flavours are reduced, the scent itself is refined by ventilation, and the perfect character is attained." Now, the prophet affirms here that Moab had been at ease from his youth. It is difficult in the face of the somewhat checkered history of Moab to see the exact meaning of this. Probably he refers to the long lapse of time since their great and awful defeat told of in 2 Kings iii. 21. Some two centuries and a half had rolled away since that dread day, and in that interval Moab regained all, and more than all, of its former prosperity. For the land was beautiful and rich in the extreme. Its pastures were covered over with sheep and its valleys with corn. The very name "Moab" is thought to mean the land of desire, that is, the desirable land. Now, during these long periods, the description here given is applicable. They had enjoyed much ease, and the natural evils engendered by their cruel idolatrous system had become more fixed and settled; "their scent had not changed." The truth, therefore, which is here taught is that prolonged and abundant ease, however coveted by men, is full of peril to their higher nature, and tends continually to the deterioration of character and the hardening of the habit of evil. Now, we note that—

I. GOD IS EVER TEACHING US THIS TRUTH. 1. *In his Word.* Cf. Ps. lv. 19, "Because they have no changes," etc. Cf. also Heb. xii., where the writer urges the acceptance of the Divine chastisements on the ground that no child of God is without them. "For what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" And as we go over the roll of names of patriarchs, prophets, apostles, saints, and above all *the* Son of God—not one was without chastisement. Of Christ it is said, "The chastisement of our peace was upon him" (Isa. liii.). And so in the history of the chosen people. How they were moved from vessel to vessel! What changes and adversities, what agitation and tossing about by wars, rebellions, invasions, captivities, etc., they had to endure! And so of the

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history of the Church! What a checkered and often tumultuous and much-tried career was allotted to her! All these illustrations from God's Word, showing the determination of God that his people should not suffer the peril of overmuch ease and become as Moab, and as they who because they have no changes, therefore, etc. 2. 2. *By analogy.* God suffers nothing to be without change. Even the rocks and hills, the solid globe, all have experienced, and do and will experience, change. The seasons alternate in their orderly change. Storm and tempest cleanse the air which, as in the Swiss valleys, would otherwise become stagnant. The great sea one prophet describes as "the troubled sea," because it can never be quiet. And yet more is this refusal of ease and quiet, this law of change, seen in all forms of life. (1) In *vegetable life.* "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die," etc. And it springs up, "First the blade, then the ear, then," etc. All the varied and ever-acting processes of change in the whole plant-world are in proof. (2) In *animal life.* Change is ever proceeding there. Even when we are asleep the work still goes on. For it to be otherwise is dissolution and death. (3) In *mental life.* Not to have that aroused, stirred by the study of fresh truth and the readjustment of old, would be to condemn to feebleness and semi-idiocy. (4) In *social life.*

"The old order changeth, giving place to new. . . .
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

(5) In *ecclesiastical life.* What was the Reformation but the tempest-storm that rushed through the valleys of the Church life of that day, where the air had become stagnant and so corrupt and poisonous that men could not breathe it and live? But the wild storm came and the air was made pure, not in the reformed lands alone, though there chiefly, but in those also that cling to the old faith. Such corruption and abominableness as characterized the ante-Reformation Church were not again possible. (6) In *political life.* Where that is healthy, overmuch ease is not possible. It has not been so with us. It has in the empires of the East, China, etc., and see the result. (7) In *moral life.* Virtue must be tried, there must be conflict and struggle if it is to continue and grow more truly itself. Hence, as in all other forms of life, we should conclude that the moral law would hold good in the spiritual life. And that this is so we learn also: 3. *By experience.* We do not glide into heaven. We are not translated, whilst in a trance, out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God. But the often severe spiritual conflicts of repentance and confession and striving against sin. "Yea, we must fight if we would win." And God's providence without us as well as his Spirit within is ever forbidding our being at ease continually. Sorrows and losses, temptations and trials, changes and adversities,—they are ever "moving us from vessel to vessel." God forces on us "changes," lest we fear not his Name.

II. BUT WHY IS ALL THIS? Because in our nature there are rooted evils which can only be got rid of by the action of this law of change. Such evils are: 1. *Self-will.* You have seen a mountain stream come brawling along over its stony bed. But on it goes, heeding not until, right in mid-stream, there is a huge rock. Down comes the stream full tilt against it, as if it were saying, "Just you get out of my way." But that is precisely the thing the rock does not do, and so the stream comes right against it. And then what a fuss, and a froth, and a foam there arises! but the rock does not move, and after a moment you will see the stream gliding softly, smoothly, quietly round the rock, and going more gently on its way. That is one of the ten thousand natural parables with which the world is full. That stream of our self-will, determined to go its own way, rushes on its course. The rock of God's law of change and adversity and trial stands in its way and will not move, and the stream of self-will is broken against it, as God intended it should be. Only by this law can this evil be cured. 2. *Pride.* Trial forces men to call on God. 3. *Unbelief.* This law of trouble and change shatters the materialism and atheism of the present day. They break down, and the soul in the day of its trouble calls upon God. 4. *Selfishness.* Ease fosters this, as it fosters all those other evils named. But trial, adversity, teach men to be "touched with the feeling" of their brethren's infirmities. 5. *Love of the world;* and 6. *Indolence.* These which ease fosters, God's law of change does much to cure.

III. HOW, THEN, SHOULD WE BEAR OURSELVES TOWARDS THIS LAW OF CHASTENING CHANGE? Cf. Heb. xii., which teaches: 1. *That we do not despise it.* By denying it, or

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by defying it. Some do this and persevere in the sins which it was designed to amend. 2. *That we do not "faint" under it.* We are not to give up in despair, letting the hands hang down and the knees totter and become feeble. But we are to take this law as a spur and lash and ask, "Wherefore dost thou contend with me?" and see to it that we amend. But: 3. *Submit ourselves unto God.* "Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father," etc.? Let his will be ours; let his way our way.

"He always wins who sides with thee;
No chance by him is lost;
Thy will is sweetest to him when
It triumphs at his cost."

(Faber.)

Then let us welcome whatever God sends, trying though it be, remembering the peril of ease and the sure profit of trial.—C.

Ver. 27.—*Touching the apple of God's eye.* A father may chasten his son, but will be very wroth if he sees another man so dealing with him. No one may punish the child but the child's father. Now, thus is it with the Lord and his people. He will, he does, punish them himself, but he allows none other to do so; or, if they presume to touch them, as Moab had done to Israel, then sure, if not swift, vengeance follows. Then is fulfilled the saying, "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of mine eye" (Deut. xxxii. 10; Zech. ii. 8). Now, why is this? The case supposed of the father who, though he chastens his own son, is yet angry if another touch him, may help us to answer this question. 1. *The child is under no obligation to the stranger.* The father has right to claim all obedience from his child; not so another. 2. *The child is not beloved by a stranger.* Anger and revenge can alone impel the stranger to do the child harm. But these are the last motives, are never the motives, of the chastisements the father inflicts. 3. *The child is unknown to the stranger* or but little known. Such a one, therefore, even if he be not actuated by evil motives, cannot possibly deal wisely with one of whom and whose character, circumstances, and needs he is ignorant. 4. *The child will get no good from chastisement by a stranger.* A father's chastisement, because of the father's love, cannot but have a mighty moral influence upon the child for his good. "What son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" But what good could come, or ever did come, to Israel and Judah from the cruelties inflicted upon them by such people as the Moabites, and of which the prophet here tells? 5. *The child will very likely be dealt cruelly and injuriously with by a stranger.* A father will chasten for his child's profit; wisdom and love will guide him. True, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "We have had fathers of our flesh who *verily* chastened us *after their own pleasure.*" But we trust that his experience was a limited one, and that there were, and yet more that there are, but few fathers who "for *their own* pleasure" would chastise their children. 6. And *the child, with all its guilt*—in the case of the Lord's children—*deserves to suffer less than they who have presumed to punish him.* Israel and Judah were guilty without doubt; but were Moab and Ammon, Babylon and the rest, less guilty? Had they nothing to answer for? Had they not far more? And so, whilst the sin of a child of God is sin indeed, yet it does not make him so heinous, so black, so repulsive, as the persistent, high-handed, never-repented-of sin of the godless, the profane, and the unbeliever. To see one who is chargeable with great sin punishing one whose sin is comparatively trivial; the man who had incurred the debt of ten thousand talents taking by the throat him whose debt was but a hundred pence;—that is evidently a monstrous thing. 7. But chief of all, because *God's people are God's children in Christ.* We are identified with the well-beloved Son. "Members of his body, his flesh and his bones, one with him." It is so, but it is not so with those who have never yielded themselves to God. Such surrender, which is faith, vitalizes the connection between us and God, and he becomes our Father, in a sense that he never was before. *Conclusion.* All history demonstrates the truth now insisted on, that "he that toucheth you," etc. Let us thank God that he will suffer none to chasten us but himself. Seek that such chastisement may be no longer necessary. Strive to do good to all, "especially to them that are of the household of faith," and tremble to do them

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harm. "Whosoever offendeth one of these little ones," said our Lord, "it were better for him that a millstone," etc.—C.

Ver. 29.—*Concerning pride.* The graces of God's Spirit are like choice flowers and fruits. They will not grow just anywhere, nor without cultivation and careful tending, and they are easily destroyed. Not so with moral evils like pride. They are as the ill weeds which grow apace. They will grow anywhere, and require no cultivation; the more you let them alone the more they will increase, and, do what you will, you can hardly destroy them. Now, concerning this ill weed, pride, note—

I. THAT IT IS VERY HATEFUL IN THE SIGHT OF GOD. See here, in this verse, with what varied names it is branded. Evil names, all of them. And turn to the many utterances in Scripture concerning this same sin, and the condemnation of God upon it will be yet more clearly seen. "There never was a saint yet that grew proud of his fine feathers, but what the Lord plucked them out by-and-by; there never yet was an angel that had pride in his heart, but he lost his wings, and fell into Gehenna, as Satan and those fallen angels did; and there shall never be a saint who indulges self-conceit and pride and self-confidence, but the Lord will spoil his glories, and trample his honours in the mire, and make him cry out yet again, 'Lord, have mercy upon me!' less than the least of all saints, and the 'very chief of sinners.' The first Adam was for self-exaltation, and to be as gods; the second bids us be as he was, 'meek and lowly in heart.'"

II. ITS SIGNS AND TOKENS. Sometimes it is so *concealed and masked that only* a very intimate acquaintance with the man enables you to detect it; and sometimes the man himself may be unaware how proud he is, and may deem himself a very Moses for meekness, when he is just the reverse. But at other times it may be discerned *in the countenance.* There is "a proud look." The face is the dial-plate of the character, "the expression" of what lies silent in the mind. *Conduct* yet more betrays it. Note how a man acts towards those whom he deems superior or inferior to himself; he will fawn upon the former, and be disdainful towards the latter. He will "mind high things," but will not "condescend to them that are of low estate." Who does not know pride's hateful ways, and has not had to suffer from them; and also, alas! has made others suffer from them at one time or another? But note—

III. SOME OF ITS OCCASIONS AND EXCITEMENTS. 1. *Birth* is one of them; as if a man chose his own father and mother. Men pride themselves that they come of a certain family, that they are "well born." "We are Abraham's children;" what a multitude of sorrows did that notion originate! They who pride themselves on those who were their ancestors in generations gone by are, as one has quaintly said, "like those useful vegetables of which we are wont to eat—the best part of them is underground." 2. *Physical strength.* "It always seems to me to be a very insane thing for a man to glory in his animal force, for there can be no merit in it. In the strength of those brawny limbs of theirs and those powerful muscles, some vaunt themselves abundantly. Though 'the Lord taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man,' yet some count it a very wonderful thing that they can outrun or outleap their fellows. O athlete, though thou be strong as Samson or swift as Asahel, what hast thou that thou hast not received? Hadst thou been born with a tendency to consumption, or with some other hereditary weakness, couldst thou have prevented it? And now that thou art strong, art thou to be praised for that, any more than a horse or a steam-engine?" (Spurgeon). 3. *Beauty.* What a fount of pride this is! 4. And *talent*—of intellect, power of application, artistic taste, and the like. 5. *Acquirements.* "I have noticed of self-made men," says one, "that they generally have great respect for their Maker." And he who has acquired wealth is in sore peril of the pride which it is apt to beget. Position, influence, high office, and the like,—these, too, are acquirements won, it may be, by diligent toil, yet, when won, may do a man much harm by generating an unhallowed pride. And even God's grace to a man in giving him a name and a place amongst sincerely religious men, even this may be an occasion of pride. Our best works may be made fuel to the fire of pride. "The demon of pride was born with us, and it will not die one hour before us. It is so woven into the very warp and woof of our nature that, till we are wrapt in our winding-sheet, we shall never be completely rid of it."

IV. SOME OF ITS MANY EVILS. They are such as these: 1. *It leads to the forgetting*

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of God. "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" (1 Cor. ix. 7). "Is not this great Babylon that I have built?" so spake the God-forgetting and therefore the God-forsaken Nebuchadnezzar" (Dan. iv. 30). 2. *It sets but little value upon God.* God dwindles in the proud man's esteem, whilst to himself he himself ever grows greater. The reverse of John the Baptist's thought is his. John said, "He must increase, but I must decrease." The proud man changes the place of the "he" and the "I." 3. *It makes a man despise his fellows.* He looks down upon them, and therefore is unjust to them. 4. *It leads him to make bad use of what gifts he has.* He is so taken up with admiration of the machinery that he fails to apply it to those ends which it was designed to serve. 5. *It is the prelude not seldom to some great fall.* "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." 6. *It makes a man content with the inferior*, when, instead of so admiring what he has, he should be aspiring after what is higher and better still. It is said of an artist that, when he had painted a picture which satisfied himself, he threw away his brushes; for now, he said, "I never shall go beyond this." And so he who is self-satisfied will never rise to a higher degree. 7. *It dishonours Christ and his cause.* A proud Christian helps the devil, for he makes men hate Christianity and all belonging to it.

V. SALUTARY SUGGESTIONS FOR ITS CURE. 1. How entirely all our gifts *are* gifts! Much as we may think of ourselves on account of them, we are excelled by very many. If we have many gifts, that does but mean much and solemn responsibility. How ill it would fare with us were we to be called now to account for the use we have made of our gifts in the past! How but for the mercy of God in Christ, the most gifted is but a poor lost sinner, cast out from the presence of God for ever!—C.

Ver. 2.—*The departed praise of Moab.* I. NOT FOR WANT OF DISPOSITION TO PRAISE. If the things had still remained which people had been in the habit of praising, they would have gone on praising. But the God of righteousness takes them away, and then there is necessary silence. Instead of praise there is humiliation, astonishment at a change so complete, but no insight into the hollowness and instability of that which had been praised. If it had all come back again, it would have been praised as much as ever. Thus we see—

II. A THING MAY BE PRAISED WITHOUT BEING PRAISEWORTHY. This can easily be understood from the experience of many who once praised things to which they are now indifferent, which they may even utterly condemn. Why this change? It may be to some extent from change in the things, but it more frequently comes from growth and increase of light and the reception of higher principles. We have ever to be on our guard against what is merely popular. Not in a cynical way, as if we grudged any one success, but recollecting what power belongs to fashion and to the love of pleasure. Let our effort be to discern, measure, and profit by intrinsic excellence.

III. THINGS NOT PRAISEWORTHY MAY GET THE HIGHEST PRAISE. Mere cleverness and astuteness, the exercise of power irrespective of ends, visible and material success on a large scale,—these attract the laudations of inconsiderate men. This is just what we may expect. If things the most praiseworthy, fullest of virtue and blessing, are yet neglected by the eyes of those who have opportunity to see them, then it is little wonder that the things most approved by the common multitude are those which God has branded as utterly bad. What changes need to be effected in human judgments, that we may be willing to burn what we adored and adore what we would have burned!

IV. GOD GIVES FRESH TOPICS OF PRAISE IF THERE BE A DISPOSITION TO CONSIDER THEM. Those whose tongues had been full of the praises of Moab needed not to be silent. The very overthrow of Moab would be a signal for praise and congratulation among the good. When the unhallowed praises of men are silenced by destruction of the things they praised, then angels begin to sing. And they who praise low, earthly things may have their thoughts introduced to heavenly ones, and then they will discover what man was made to praise. How the words that are exaggerated and altogether disproportioned when applied to the works of men, have in them an exquisite fitness when we speak of the works of God or of Christ, or of men properly engaged in Christian service!—Y.

Ver. 7.—*The consequence of a wrong confidence.* I. THE CAPTURE WAS THEIR OWN FAULT. Not all capture is so. There may be a going into durance for conscience' sake;

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there may be the necessary surrender to superior strength; the captured one may be the victim for a time to the unscrupulous selfishness of others. We must be careful not to draw rash conclusions from suffering to sin; for therein we may be adding suffering to suffering. As a rule, when suffering comes from sin, the sufferer is not left without a witness in his own heart. But inasmuch as it is a whole people that is here suffering nationally, there needs to be a distinct mention of why they are suffering. We are also reminded how important it is to make the distinction between what comes through our own fault and what comes through other causes.

II. WRONG OBJECTS OF TRUST ALWAYS INVOLVE SOME DISASTER. It is but the form that differs; the real, essential mischief is always there. God mentions here the best things a man can have outside of God himself. There is his own worth, that into which he puts his energy, skill, and experience; where also he profits by the work of those who have gone before him. There are also the pleasures of life, all that a man, in his best judgment, reckons to be best. Moab would reckon among its pleasures its men of war, its chosen young men, its accumulation of wealth. But all these things, solid and extensive as they look, give no guarantee of abiding security and prosperity. They may, by the very falsehood of appearances, become the ministers of ruin. The case is as if a plant should seek root in its own substance, as if a man should try to maintain physical life from his own body. And to trust other people is an even more precarious ground of support than we find in ourselves. For in ourselves there is at all events the element of self-interest to help us. No doubt, by the work and the pleasures here mentioned, there is a reference to the idol worshipped in Moab, which indeed is mentioned in the same verse. We can hardly understand the feeling ourselves, but great must have been the confidence of Moab in its god; and this, of course, amounted to nothing else than its own imagination of deity. So we may be trusting in an apparent connection with God, in forms of religion, in works that look as if they were meant for God's glory and for our good. But nothing is of any use as a ground of confidence unless it has a living connection with the Infinite and the Eternal.—Y.

Ver. 10.—*Doing the work of Jehovah deceitfully.* I. THE ENTRUSTING OF JEHOVAH'S WORK TO THE HANDS OF MEN. Here is a great work of judgment, and Jehovah effects such works either through operations of his own or through agents to whom he makes the awful duty evident. What he has done himself is sufficiently illustrated in many terrible visitations recorded in the Old Testament; nor is there entire absence of such a record in the New. But men have also been called to visit upon others their iniquity in a solemn and thorough way. That men have made the command of God a pretext for the greatest cruelties, and for indiscriminate slaughter on an extensive scale, does not in the least alter the fact that such commands have been given—given out of the greatest wisdom and with the best results. Every nation reckons that the temporal life of its subjects is at its disposal; they must be ready to serve with life or in death, as may be required. And shall not the God of all the earth dispose of temporal life according as his all-comprehending wisdom sees may be best for the whole world and for all ages?

II. THE TEMPTATIONS TO DO THIS WORK DECEITFULLY. Not, perhaps, with an intention to deceive, but with sophistical evasions, with attempts to make something less than completeness seem complete. Such an act was that of Saul when he went out with a stern command ringing in his ears—the command of one proved to be a prophet, that he should utterly slay the Amalekites. He seemed to have reason in the pleas he urged for the imperfect execution of the command. And so it may often be. There looks to be needless severity, needless waste. Oftentimes there is an amount of suffering, suffering even of the innocent, which takes all will and vigour out of the arm that should strike God's blow. Besides, it needs to be always borne in mind that the Word of God requiring severity and suffering is only a part of God's work. We shrink from it through mere sensitiveness to pain. But there is another large sphere of work where there is plain benefit, where we have to make no one suffer, where we are contributors to something positive. The husbandman is not for ever plucking up weeds; his main work is to sow good seed and reap it. "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully" is a word that has its correspondence in Paul's ejaculation, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel." Jesus put his servants through an exacting discipline, a self-revealing one, in order that they might do his work thoroughly, uprooting all evil,

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getting down to proper foundations, making no compromises, ready for all persecutions. They who, after preparation and warning and putting their hands to the work, yet do that work with slack hands, cannot wonder if God should in due time make manifest his anger with them for their heedlessness.—Y.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Moab settled on the lees.* Here we find a not uncommon difficulty in the Old Testament, namely, that of an illustration which *to us* is by no means so clear as the thing to be illustrated. The words are spoken with regard to a wine country. This will be seen on looking at the references in vers. 32, 33 to the wine of Sibmah, the spoiled vintage, the wine that has failed from the wine-presses, the silence where once was shouting of those who trod the grapes. An illustration drawn from the process of making wine perfect was, therefore, most appropriate. It would be understood and convey its lesson at once to those of the right disposition. We, however, must go to the underlying truth at once, without pretending to see the propriety of the illustration in all its parts. Moreover, we must look on Moab itself as representative of individuals. We have to look at individuals, at the possibilities of their life, at the experiences they ought to pass through, and the results which come from missing those experiences.

I. THE POSSIBILITIES OF LIFE. "Moab hath settled on his lees." Moab is, therefore, compared to wine. There are sour grapes with which nothing can be done; but there are also grapes of splendid natural quality, that have had the best culture of the vineyard and have come to all due ripeness. That which is to become perfect wine starts from a fruit of which much is expected. The wine-producer knows that his wine will be according to his grapes. Now, from Moab much was expected; this truth being involved in the very comparison to wine. There was something that had in it the making of an exquisite taste and an exquisite scent.

II. HOW THE POSSIBILITIES ARE MISSED. There is the chance of ease, enjoyment, and self-indulgence, and this chance is ignobly accepted. Of some men the character is tried by difficulties and repeated discouragements; the strength and worth that lie deep in them are manifested by their perseverance. Other men are tried by the absence of difficulties. They are born to a competency. As children they have whatever money can provide for in the way of instruction and pleasure. Everything external to them is made as easy as it can be made. Many voices, near to them every day and all day long, say, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." Everything depends on the way the young man, placed in such circumstances, looks.

III. THE RESULT OF NEGLECTED DISCIPLINE. Possessions give opportunities of service, opportunities denied to many, who see the needs of others, have the will to meet them, and lack the power. Is it not a righteous thing that God should deal severely with those whose circumstances give them the means and the time for doing great good, and yet who fill their lives with selfish pleasure? Such lives will come out at last in pitiable contrast with what they might have been. To change the figure: "If the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? henceforth it is good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men." Note how the vessels that should have been used toward the perfection of the wine, and the bottles that should have held them, become at last useless. If we will not use our opportunities for God's purpose, God will secure, in due time, that we should not use them for our own.—Y.

Vers. 26, 27.—*Moab exulting over fallen Israel.* Here is another allusion to a wine country. Moab knew well what it was to drink to excess. The drunkard with his silly talk and behaviour is a common object of ridicule everywhere. And Moab shall become to other nations abject and degraded as the drunkard. This is the end of its wrong excitement over the fall of Israel. Moab has seen Israel in its days of power and glory and pride, and, seeing, has feared. Could the days of Balak and the prophecies of Balaam be forgotten? Nor is it likely that Israel would be without unseemly exultations and reciprocal jealousies. And now at last Israel falls. And all that Moab can take knowledge of is the fact of the fall. That it has been caused by disobedience and rebellion, that Jehovah is the real Author of it and not the King of Babylon, who is but as Jehovah's sword, Moab cannot well have means for knowing. All it can see is a rival fallen, and as it seems permanently fallen. Therefore Moab must be

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taught a lesson. In exulting over Israel it is exulting against Jehovah. Indeed, there is no reason why we should reject the notion of some open and bold comparison between the weakness of Jehovah, God of Israel, and the strength of Chemosh, god of Moab. As if the people said, "See how strong Chemosh is; for we are still here, though Babylonian armies have not been far from us! and see how weak Jehovah is; for the nation to whom he was God is gone into a distant captivity!" To exult over the fall of those who have been avowedly the servants of God is a dangerous thing to do. The man who is tempted and falls should be an object of pity, one to be helped up and reinstated, even though the work needed for this be one with some loss and risk to ourselves. And surely we should be especially careful not to rejoice over the calamities of those whose calamity seems to give us a better chance. Moab had now to drink to the dregs a cup of shame, because it had failed to comprehend the duty of rejoicing with those who rejoiced and weeping with those who wept.—Y.

Ver. 38.—*The broken vessel.* I. NOT BROKEN BY ACCIDENT. A vessel broken by accident would not have furnished the proper figure. Lives that are as real serviceable vessels in the hand of God never do get broken by accident. Earthen vessels though they often be, there is a providence and a watchfulness which preserves them till their work is done. They are kept through days of persecution; they are restored from sickness; they live on into a good old age, while men apparently stronger and of greater physical resource are stricken down. And when there seems sometimes a premature and unaccountable breaking, yet it is really to be regarded in another light, namely, as a change to higher and fuller service.

II. NOT BROKEN BY CAPRICE. That which is not broken accidentally must have been broken purposely. And if purposely, either with a reason or through mere recklessness. Men too often destroy things in a reckless, thoughtless way, from the first unconsidered impulse that comes into the mind. It is an action in which is expressed, by a sort of bravado, the sentiment that a man may do what he likes with his own. But God would ever have us feel that, though he has made the world and all that therein is, his disposition of these works is regulated by fixed laws, and our disposition of things under our control should be regulated in the same way. Never let it be said of us that we have destroyed or injured anything without sufficient reason. We should not even pull a flower to pieces through mere thoughtlessness, mere vacuity of mind.

III. BROKEN FOR A SUFFICIENT REASON. Moab is a vessel in which there is no pleasure. It is of no real use to God. Whether we shall be vessels of use to God or not depends upon whether we put ourselves as clay into his hands as Potter. Moab was a nation which had loved to shape its own life, to hew its own designs. And just in proportion as it persevered in this path did it become useless to God. Appearance is only a small thing. The first consideration is use. The commonest earthenware pitcher, if without a flaw, is worth more than a cracked golden pitcher that will hold no water—worth more, that is, as a pitcher. Gold is a rare, glittering, fascinating thing compared with common earth, but after all it is the common earth out of which vessels are made for daily use. The real value of a human life depends upon what God gets out of it.—Y.

Vers. 43, 44.—*No ultimate escape.* I. THERE ARE TEMPORARY EVASIONS OF DOOM. As there are great varieties of wickedness, so there is also great variety in the consequences of it. Sometimes the visitation is sudden, quick, and terrible, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira. But oftener men go on sinning with no bad consequences to themselves, so far as appearance goes. They do not lose health; they do not seem to lose reputation; there are no checks in their success; and perhaps they even furnish an example whereby worldly wisdom hangs its maxim that it is not well to be too particular. The frequent prosperity of the wicked is indeed a fact not at all concealed or qualified in the Scriptures. A man of the world takes his own worldly way to keep peril at a distance, and he seems to fall into no pit, no snare. Let all this be allowed. Nothing is gained by trying to make out that the wicked have no advantages. It was an old-world legend that some men sold themselves to the devil, and that his protection secured to them their wonderful immunities and prosperity.

II. THERE IS NO WAY OF ESCAPE FROM DANGER SAVE GOD'S WAY. All that is gained is in the way of postponement. Wicked men travel in a narrowing path, and at

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last are shut up to face the judgments of God. The moment of what seems to them complete success is quickly followed by the moment of complete collapse. We have the crowning illustration of this in the death of Jesus. His enemies seemed to have succeeded. All their efforts to bring his death about had been wonderfully favoured. And what could they do but be jubilant when he was actually dead? The death of Jesus, however, was really a condition for the utter downfall of these enemies. The grave of Jesus, so to speak, was the snare in which spiritual evil was finally taken and overcome. It is one of the triumphs of faith to be well assured in our own hearts that there is no ultimate escape for wickedness. God has his own wise reasons in tolerating wicked men for a long time, and the evil they do to others is not so great in reality as it is in appearance. They cannot inflict more than outward suffering and inconvenience on God's people. Indeed, the mischief they mean to do can be wonderfully transmuted to good.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XLIX.

On Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar and Hazor, and Elam.

Vers. 1—3.—The violence of the Ammonites shall be severely punished.

Ver. 1.—**Hath Israel no sons?** The violent seizure, perpetrated before his eyes, of parts of the sacred territory, forces the indignant question from the prophet, "How can these things be?" It was so on a former occasion (see ch. ii. 14), and it is so again, now that the Ammonites are occupying the land of the Gadites. True, the present generation has lost its property, but the next is the heir to all its rights and privileges. **Their king**; rather, *their King*—their Mélech or Molech; it is the heavenly, not the earthly king who is referred to (so in Amos i. 15; Zeph. i. 5). The Septuagint, the Syriac, and the Vulgate, however, read *Milcom*, which was the name of the Ammonite deity; this is only a different vocalizing of the consonants of the text. The actual vowel-points give "malcam." This reading *may*, of course, be interpreted of the *earthly* king of the Ammonites. But this view ignores the obvious parallelism of ch. xlviii. 7. "Chĕmósh shall go forth into captivity." **Inherit.** The primary meaning of the word is "to take possession of, especially by force, 1 Kings xxi. 6" (Gesenius, *ad voc.*), and this is the sense evidently required here (comp. ch. viii. 10).

Ver. 2.—The punishment of Ammon. Its capital, Rabbah (see 2 Sam. xii. 26, 27), and the "daughter" cities (comp. Numb. xxi. 25, margin; Josh. xv. 45 and xvii. 11 in the Hebrew), shall be laid waste. **The alarm of war** ("alarm" equivalent to "shout"), as in ch. iv. 19. **A desolate heap.** Fortified towns were built on "heaps," or slight elevations (comp. on ch. xxx. 18), the Hebrew name for which (in the singular) is *tel*. The "heap" and the ruins of the town together are aptly called a "heap of desolation." **Then shall Israel be heir,** etc.; rather, *then shall Israel dispossess those who dispossessed him* (comp. ver. 1). The form of the phrase reminds us of Isa. xiv. 2.

Ver. 3.—**Heshbon.** Here mentioned as *de jure* a Gadite, but *de facto* an Ammonitish, town; in Numb. xxi. 26 it appears as "the city of Sihon" the Amorite. In Isa. xv. 4 and xvi. 9 it is reckoned to the Moabites. There was a continual warfare between the neighbouring tribes of Reuben and Gad on the one hand, and the Moabites and Ammonites on the other. **Let Heshbon lament, because Ai is spoiled.** The introduction of Ai, which is only known to us as a Canaanitish town, near Bethel, on the wrong side of the Jordan for Moab, is startling. It is replied that we have no list of the Ammonitish cities, and that there may have been another town named Ai. The reply is valid; but leaves a second difficulty untouched, viz. that the mention of a third place destroys the continuity of thought. First, we are made acquainted with the fall of Rabbah; then Heshbon (probably the second place in the country) is called upon to wail because *x* has been taken by storm; then the populations of the "daughter" cities are summoned to join in the lamentation over Rabbah;—is it not reasonable to conclude that the subject of the mourning is one and the same? Now, it is well known that the received text abounds in small errors arising from the confusion of similar Hebrew letters, and that among the letters most easily confounded are *yod* and *resh*. Is it not an obvious conclusion that for *Ai* we should rather read *Ar* ("the city"), a name as suitable for the capital of Ammon as for that of Moab? It is true that we have no example elsewhere of Rabbah being called by the name of Ar; but in 2 Sam. x. 3, 14 it is described as "the city," and we have to be on our guard against the argument *a silentio*—that favourite weapon of destructive cri-

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ticism! Since a conjecture must be made, it is more respectful to the prophet to choose the one which is most suitable to the context. **Daughters of Rabbah**; *i.e.* unwalled towns (as in ver. 2). **Run to and fro by the hedges**; rather, *by the enclosures*; i.e. wander about in the open country, seeking a lodging-place in the enclosures of the sheepfolds (so Numb. xxxii. 24, Hebrew) or the vineyards (so Numb. xxii. 24, Hebrew). **Their king**; or, *Milcom* (see on ver. 1).

Ver. 4.—**The valleys**; *i.e.* long-extended plains, such as were suitable for corn-fields (Isa. xvii. 5; Ps. lxv. 14), and such as characterized the territory of the Ammonites. **Thy flowing valley.** "Flowing;" that is, abounding with rich crops. The meaning of the phrase, however, is only probable.

Ver. 5.—The Ammonitish community dissolved; every one caring for himself. **Every man right forth**; *i.e.* straight before him, in a wild panic which expels every thought but that of self-preservation. **Him that wandereth.** Collectively for "the wanderers," *i.e.* the fugitives. So it is said of the Babylonians, that they are "like sheep with none to gather them."

Ver. 6.—Revival of the Ammonites (see on ch. xlviii. 47).

Vers. 7—10.—A startling picture of the judgment impending over Edom, the severity of which is to be inferred from the behaviour of the sufferers. Observe, no allusion is made by Jeremiah to any special bitter feeling of the Edomites towards the Israelites, such as is implied in Isa. xxxiv.; Ezek. xxxv., and other passages. With regard to the fulfilment of the prophecy, we may fairly quote in the first place Mal. i. 2—4. The agents in the desolation there referred to (still fresh in Malachi's recollection) are probably the Nabathæans (an Arab race, though writing Aramaic), who, after occupying Edom, dropped their nomad habits, devoted themselves to commerce, and founded the kingdom of Arabia Petræa. Meantime the Edomites maintained an independent existence in the midst of the Jewish colonists, till John Hyrcanus compelled them to accept circumcision about B.C. 130. In spite of this enforced religious and political union, the Edomites remained perfectly conscious of their nationality, and we find them mentioned as a distinct factor in the community in Josephus's account of the great Jewish war. They pass away from history after the destruction of Jerusalem, A.D. 70.

Ver. 7.—**Teman** was celebrated for its "wisdom," *i.e.* for a practical moral philosophy, similar to that which we find in the less distinctly religious portions of the Book of Proverbs. It was this "wisdom" which formed the common element in the higher culture of the Semitic peoples, and of which the sacred narrator speaks when he says that "Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country" (1 Kings iv. 30). One of Job's friends, Eliphaz, was a Temanite (Job ii. 11). From ver. 20, however, it appears that Teman is here used for Edom in general, of which it formed a part. "Wisdom" was doubtless cultivated throughout Idumæa (Obad. 8), the "land of Uz," in which Job dwelt, was probably in the east of Edom (see on ch. xxv. 20). **Is their wisdom vanished?** The Hebrew, with its characteristic love for material symbols, has, "Is their wisdom poured out?" So in ch. xix. 7, "I will pour out [a different word, however, is used] the counsel of Judah." The body being regarded as a vessel, it was natural to represent the principle of life, both physical (Isa. liii. 12) and intellectual (as here), under the symbol of a liquid.

Ver. 8.—**Turn back.** The grammatical form is peculiar (literally, *be made to turn back*). If the punctuation is not an oversight, the object is to suggest the compulsiveness of the change of route of the Dedanites. **Dwell deep**; *i.e.* tarry in the deepest recesses ye can find, so as to avoid the calamities of the Edomites. The Dedanites, it will be remembered, were a tribe devoted to commerce (see on ch. xxv. 23). Isaiah had already, on an earlier occasion, given the same advice as Jeremiah, viz. to leave the beaten track and take refuge in a less exposed part of the desert, where shrubs and thorn-bushes ("the forest," or rather, "the thickets") would secure them to some extent from observation (Isa. xxi. 13). See, however, ver. 10.

Ver. 9.—**If grape-gatherers**, etc. Jeremiah modifies his original in Obad. 5; the interrogative clauses here become affirmative. Render, *If vintagers come to thee, they will not leave any gleanings: if thieves by night, they destroy what is sufficient for them.*

Ver. 10.—**But**, etc.; rather, *for*. The verse gives the reason why the destruction is so complete. "It is I, Jehovah, who made Esau bare," etc. "Esau," *i.e.* Edom (Gen. xxv. 30). **His seed**; *i.e.* the Edomites. **His brethren**, or kinsmen; *i.e.* the Amalekites (Gen. xxxvi. 12). **His neighbours**; *i.e.* the tribes of Dedan, Tema, and Buz (ch. xxv. 23).

Vers. 11—13.—A merciful mitigation of the prophet's stern threat. The true God will provide for the widows and orphans, if Edom will but commit them to him. And let not Edom think it strange that he is punished; for even Israel, the chosen people, has drunk of the bitter cup. Yea, Jehovah has sworn "by himself" that all Edom's cities shall be laid waste.

Ver. 11.—**Leave thy fatherless children,**

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etc. The invitation means more than might be supposed. It is equivalent to a promise of the revival of the Edomitish people (comp. on ch. xlvi. 26; xlviii. 47).

Ver. 12.—**Whose judgment was not**, etc.; rather, *to whom it was not due*, etc. Jehovah condescends to speak from a human point of view. So, in Isa. xxviii. 21, the punishment of Jerusalem is called his "strange work." **Have assuredly drunken**; rather, *shall surely drink*.

Ver. 13.—**Bozrah.** This seems to have been at one time the capital of Edom (see Amos i. 12; Isa. xxxiv. 6; lxiii. 1). It was a hill city (comp. on ver. 16); a village called Busaira (*i.e.* little Bozrah) now stands among its ruins. **Perpetual wastes.** A phrase characteristic of Jeremiah (see also ch. xxv. 9) and of the second part of Isaiah (lviii. 12; lxi. 4).

Vers. 14—18.—Based at first on the older prophecy (see Obad. 1—4); then follow two verses in Jeremiah's peculiar manner. As yet Edom feels himself secure in his rocky home. But a Divine impulse already stirs the nation, through whom Jehovah wills to humble the proud. Edom shall become a second Sodom.

Ver. 14.—**I have heard a rumour.** In Obadiah it is "*we* have heard," *i.e.* the company of prophets (comp. Isa. liii. 1, "Who hath believed *our* report?" according to one interpretation). Jeremiah, to justify his adoption of the outward form of his prophecy, declares that he is personally responsible for its substance. "Rumour," or as the word is elsewhere rendered, "report," is a technical term for a prophetic revelation (Obad. 1; Isa. xxviii. 9, 19; liii. 1; comp. Isa. xxi. 10; xxviii. 22); and it is from this Old Testament usage that ἀκοή acquires its special meaning in Rom. x. 16, 17. In fact, ἀκοή, or hearing, is a more exact equivalent of the original. A prophet is one who has "listened in the council of God" (Job xv. 8, corrected version; comp. Amos iii. 7), and "when the Lord Jehovah hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" (Amos iii. 8). Prophetic perception of Divine truth is so exceptional a thing that it can only be expressed approximately in terms of everyday life. One while it may be called a "hearing," a "report," another while a "vision," or "intuition." He who makes to hear or see is, of course, Jehovah, through the objective influence of his Spirit. It is important to study the Biblical phraseology, which has a depth of meaning too often overlooked, owing to the blunter edge which time has given to our modern speech. **An ambassador**; rather, *a herald*. **Unto the heathen**; rather, *unto the nations*. There is no religious idea involved; the word *goyim* literally means "nations," and there is no reason for deviating from the primary sense. In the next verse it is even more necessary to make this correction.

Ver. 16.—**Thy terribleness.** This is certainly the best rendering of this ἅπαξ λεγόμενον. The "terribleness" of Edom consisted in the fact that the other nations shrank from disturbing her in her rocky fastness. **In the clefts of the rock.** Probably with an allusion to the rock-city Sela, or Petra ("rock"); as perhaps in "the height of the hill" to the situation of Bozrah; see on ver. 13 (Graf). **As the eagle.** Not any eagle is meant, but the griffon (*Gyps fulvus*), or great vulture (Tristram).

Ver. 17.—**A desolation**; rather, *an astonishment*. The word is from the same root as the following verb. The phrase is characteristic of Jeremiah, who has no scruple in repeating a forcible expression, and so enforcing an important truth (comp. ch. xxv. 11, 38; l. 23; li. 43). What so "astonishing" as the reverses of once flourishing kingdoms! For the Bible knows nothing of the "necessity" of the decay and death of nations. The "covenant" which Jehovah offers contains the pledge of indestructibility. **Every one that goeth by it**, etc. Another self-reminiscence (see ch. xix. 8).

Ver. 18.—**As in the overthrow**, etc.; comp. Deut. xxix. 2, which explains the reference in "the neighbour cities" (Admah and Zeboim). The verse is repeated in ch. l. 40. It does not, of course, mean that fire and brimstone should be the agents of destruction (nor is even Isa. xxxiv. 9 to be understood literally), but that the desolate appearance of Edom should remind of that of the neighbourhood of the Dead Sea (comp. Isa. xiii. 19; Amos iv. 11).

Vers. 19—22.—Figures descriptive of the unique physical qualities of the destined conqueror of Edom. Both figures have been used before (see ch. iv. 7; xlviii. 40).

Ver. 19.—**He shall come.** The subject is withheld, as in ch. xlvi. 18 (see note); xlviii. 40. **The swelling of Jordan**; rather, *the pride of Jordan;* i.e. the luxuriant thickets on its banks. See on ch. xii. 5, where the phrase first occurs. **Against the habitation of the strong**; rather, *to the evergreen pasture*. The word rendered "evergreen" is one of those which are the despair of interpreters, from their fulness of meaning. The root-meaning is simply "continuance," whether it be continuance of strength (comp. Micah vi. 2, Hebrew) or of the flow of a stream (Deut. xxi. 4; Amos v. 24), or, as here, of the perennial verdure of a well-watered pasturage. **But I will suddenly make him run away from her.** Make whom? The lion? Such is the natural inference

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from the Authorized Version, but the context absolutely forbids it. It seems useless to mention the crowd of explanations which have been offered of this "obscure and much-vexed passage," as old Matthew Poole calls it, since in ch. l. 44 we have precisely the same phrase, but with another suffix, which clears up the meaning. We may, therefore, either *read* (with the Septuagint and the Syriac Version), "For I will suddenly make them run away from it" (viz. the pasture), or keep the old reading "him" for "them," and explain "him" as meaning the Edomites. The expression used for "suddenly" is very forcible; we might render, with Ewald, "in the twinling of an eye." **And who is a chosen man,** etc.? A still more difficult clause. If the text is correct, which cannot be assumed as certain, we should probably render, with Ewald, "and will appoint over it [*i.e.* the land of Edom] him who is chosen," viz. Nebuchadnezzar. **Who will appoint me the time?** The same phrase is rendered in Job ix. 19, "Who shall set me a time to plead?" (comp. the Latin phrase *dicur dicere*). To drag a defendant before the tribunal implies equality of rank. One might venture to do this with Nebuchadnezzar, if he were not the representative of One still mightier. Finally, **Who is that shepherd that will stand before me?** The land of Edom has been likened to a pasture; it is natural that the ruler should be now described as a shepherd (comp. ch. xxix. 34).

Ver. 20.—**The counsel of the Lord.** At first sight this appears to detract from the perfection of Jehovah. But another prophet declares that the Divine "counsels" are "framed" from eternity (Isa. xxii. 11; xxxvii. 26). **Surely the least,** etc.; rather, *Surely they shall drag them along, the weak ones of the flock; surely their pasture shall be appalled at them.* Such is the sad fate of the sheep, now that the resistance of their shepherd has been overpowered. "The weak ones of the flock" is a phrase quite in Jeremiah's manner; its opposite is "the noble ones of the flock" (ch. xxv. 34).

Ver. 21.—**Is moved;** rather, *quaketh* (as ch. viii. 16). It is a pity that the Authorized Version has not preserved the present tense throughout the verse. The prophet seems to see his prediction realized before him. **In the Red Sea;** rather, *beside the Red Sea;* comp. 1 Kings ix. 26, "Eloth, on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom."

Ver. 22.—**Behold, he shall come up . . . Bozrah.** Repeated from ch. xlviii. 40, with the substitution of "Bozrah" for "Moab," and the addition of "and he shall come up" from ver. 19. For "Bozrah," see on ver. 13. **And at that day.** Repeated from ch. xlviii. 41 (latter half), with the exception that "Edom" stands for "Moab."

Vers. 23—27.—The heading **Concerning Damascus** is too limited (like that of the partly parallel prophecy in Isa. xvii. 1—11); for the prophecy relates, not only to Damascus, the capital of the kingdom of south-eastern Aram (or Syria), but to Hamath, the capital of the northern kingdom. (The third of the Aramæan kingdoms, that of Zobah, had ceased to exist.) Damascus had already been threatened by Amos (i. 3—5), and by Isaiah (xvii. 1—11). We may infer from the prophecy that Damascus had provoked the hostility of Nebuchadnezzar, but we have as yet no monumental evidence as to the facts.

Ver. 23.—**Hamath.** Still an important city under the name of Hamah, situated to the north of Hums (Emesa), on the Orontes. It formed nominally the boundary of the kingdom of Israel (Numb. xxxiv. 8; Josh. xiii. 5), was actually a part of the empire of Solomon (2 Chron. viii. 4), and was conquered for a short time by Jeroboam II. (2 Kings xiv. 25). Under Sargon it was fully incorporated into the Assyrian empire (comp. Isa. x. 9); rebellious populations were repeatedly transplanted into the territory of Hamath. **Arpad.** Always mentioned together with Hamath, whose fate it appears to have shared (Isa. x. 9). A tell, or hill, with ruins, about three (German) miles from Aleppo, still bears the name Erfâd (*Zeitschrift* of the German Oriental Society, xxv. 655). There is **sorrow on the sea,** etc.; *i.e.* even the sea participates in the agitation of that troublous time: somewhat as in Hab. iii. 10 the sea is represented as sympathizing in the terror produced by a Divine manifestation. But by the slightest possible emendation (viz. of *caph* into *beth*) we obtain a more natural sense—"with an unrest *as of* the sea, which cannot be quiet." In Isa. lvii. 20 we read, "For the ungodly are like the troubled sea, for it cannot be quiet;" and it can hardly be doubted that Jeremiah is alluding to this passage. If he altered it at all, it would be in the direction of greater smoothness rather than the reverse. Not a few manuscripts of Jeremiah actually have this corrected reading, which should probably be adopted.

Ver. 25.—**How is the city of praise not left,** etc.! A difficult passage. The construction, indeed, is plain. "How is not," etc.! can only mean "How is it that the city of praise is not," etc.? (comp. 2 Sam. i. 14). The difficulty lies in the word rendered "left." The ordinary meaning of the verb, when applied to cities, is certainly "to leave without inhabitants;" *e.g.* ch. iv. 29; Isa. vii. 16; xxxii. 14. This, however, does

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not suit the context, which shows that "the daughter of Damascus" personified is the speaker, so that ver. 25 ought rather to mean, "How is it that the city of praise *is* [not, '*is not*'] forsaken?" Either, then, we must suppose that "not" has been inserted by mistake—a too arbitrary step, seeing that there is no negative in the context to account for the insertion (the case is different, therefore, from Job xxi. 30; xxvii. 15, where such an insertion is at any rate justifiable); or else we must give *'ăzzĕbhāh* the sense of "let go free" (comp. Exod. xxiii. 5; Deut. xxxii. 36; Job x. 1). It is the obstinate incredulity of love which refuses to admit the possibility of the destruction of the loved object. *The city of praise.* The city which is my "praise," or boast. Few cities, in fact, have had so long and brilliant an existence as Damascus.

Ver. 27.—**And I will kindle,** etc. A combination of clauses from Amos i. 14 and i. 4. Three several kings of Damascus bore the name of Ben-hadad: one the contemporary of King Baasha of Samaria; another, of Ahab; a third, of Joash. (Ben-hadad, however, should rather be Ben-hadar, agreeably to the Assyrian inscriptions and the Septuagint.)

Vers. 28—33.—Against the nomad and partly settled Arabs—the former described under the name **Kedar** (see on ch. ii. 10), the latter under that of **Hazor** (connected with *hāzēr*, an unwalled village; comp. Lev. xxv. 31). This use of Hazor is remarkable; elsewhere the name denotes towns in Palestine (Josh. xi. 1; xv. 23; Neh. xi. 33). There are two plainly marked strophes, vers. 28—30 and 31—33, both beginning with a summons to the foe to take the field.

Ver. 28.—Hazor (*i.e.* the settled Arabs) is said to have **kingdoms.** "King" is used in Hebrew in a wider sense than we are accustomed to (comp. ch. xxv. 24, "All the kings of Arabia"). The "kings" of Hazor would be mere sheikhs or emirs. **Shall smite;** rather, *smote.* There is no justification whatever for the future. The statement is obviously a later addition, to show that the prophecy was fulfilled. On the form "Nebuchadrezzar," see on ch. xxi. 2. **The men of the east.** A general designation of the inhabitants of all the countries in the east of Palestine (Gen. xxix. 1; Judg. vi. 3; Job i. 3).

Ver. 29.—All the possessions of the nomad are here mentioned—first his tents and his flocks; then the hangings of which the tent is composed (ch. iv. 20; x. 20), and the vessels which it contains; and finally the camels which the Arab rides, not to mention their other uses. All this shall be ruthlessly appropriated by the Chaldean invaders. **Fear is on every side.** Again Jeremiah's motto recurs (see on ch. vi. 25). It expresses here, not the war-cry itself, but the result produced by it.

Ver. 30.—The prophet turns to the Arabs in villages who have still more to tempt the cupidity of plunderers, and urges them to flee while there is still time. **Dwell deep** (see on ver. 8). **Against you.** This is the reading of the Septuagint (Alex. MS.), the Targum, the Vulgate, and many extant Hebrew manuscripts. The received text, however, has "against them." Such alternations of person have met us again and again, and there is no occasion to doubt the ordinary reading.

Ver. 31.—How **easy** is the expedition to which the Chaldean army is invited!—it is a mere holiday march. Resistance is impossible, for an enemy has never been dreamed of. The tribes of Hazor are *not*, indeed, a **wealthy nation,** for they have but little wealth to tempt either the conqueror or the merchant; they "live alone;" they are an uncommercial and unwarlike, but a profoundly "tranquil, nation, that dwelleth securely [or, 'confidently']"—a description reminding us of Judg. viii. 7; Ezek. xxxviii. 11. In their idyllic, patriarchal state they feel no need of walls with their accompanying double gates (the gates of ancient cities were so large that they were divided) and bars. Like Israel in the prophetic vision (Numb. xxiii. 9), "they dwell alone."

Ver. 32.—**Them that are in the utmost corners.** Another of Jeremiah's characteristic phrases, which should rather be rendered, *the corner-clipped* (i.e. having the hair cut off about the ears and temples; see on ch. ix. 26). **From all sides.** "Nebuchadnezzar will so arrange his troops that the Bedaween [but the people of Hazor were not Bedaween, *i.e.* desert-Arabs] will be surrounded on all sides, and, being thus unable to escape in a body, will be scattered to 'all the winds,' to the four quarters of the earth" (Dr. Payne Smith).

Ver. 33.—The same fate predicted for Hazor as for Edom (ver. 18). **Dragons;** rather, *jackals* (see on ch. x. 22).

Vers. 34—39.—Concerning Elam. The title places this prophecy later than those in ch. xlviii. 1—xlix. 33; viz. at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah. From this fact, and from the absence of any reference to Nebuchadnezzar as the instrument of Elam's humiliation, Ewald conjectures that the Elamites had been concerned in the events which led to the dethronement and captivity of Jehoiachin. Dr. Payne Smith is inclined to accept this hypothesis, remarking that the Elamites "appear perpetually as the allies of Merodach-baladan and his sons in their struggles for independence." We are not yet, however, in pos-

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session of information as to the relations of Elam to the great Babylonian empire which rose upon the ruins of the Assyrian. Ewald's conjecture is a possibility, and no more. And what was Elam? One of the most ancient kingdoms in the world (see Gen. xiv.). Geographically it was the tract of country, partly mountainous, partly lowland, lying south of Assyria and east of Persia proper, to which Herodotus gives the name of Cissia, and the classical geographers that of Tusis or Tusiana. This is clear, says Schrader, from the Persian text of the Behistun inscription of Darius. It is frequently mentioned under the name "Ilam," or "Ilamti," in the Assyrian inscriptions, especially in those of Sargon, Sennacherib, and Assurbanipal. In B.C 721 Sargon states that he annexed a district or province of Elam (and hence, perhaps, we must explain the mention of the Elamites in the Assyrian army in Isa. xxii. 6), which was, doubtless, one cause of the embittered feeling towards Assyria of the portion which remained independent. The annals of the heroic struggle of Merodach-baladan contain repeated reference to the King of Elam. Assurbanipal made no less than three invasions of Elam, and the singular pretext for the third is, curiously enough, associated with the remarkable fourteenth chapter of Genesis. It was this—that the Elamite king had refused to deliver up an image of the goddess Nana, which Kudur-nankhundi, an ancient Elamite monarch, had carried off, and which had remained 1635 or (perhaps) 1535 years in Elam.[1] This king has been plausibly conjectured to be a member of the same dynasty as "Chedorlaomer [= Kudur-Lagamar] King of Elam." This time it was all over with Elam; Shushan itself was plundered and destroyed, and far and wide the country was laid waste. That so restless and courageous a people should have become famous among the surrounding nations was only to be expected; and it is a striking proof of this that Ezekiel, in describing the companions whom fallen Egypt would meet with in Hades, mentions "Elam and all her multitude" (Ezek. xxxii. 24). The fact that the Septuagint has the heading twice over—first very briefly (in ch. xxv. 14, where it is followed by this prophecy), and then at full length (in ch. xxvi. 1, at the end of the prophecy of Elam)—has been variously explained. It is, at any rate, clear that there is some confusion in the present text of this translation. In connection with this prediction it is interesting to notice one of the results of a new cuneiform discovery among some tablets acquired in 1878 by the British Museum. At the very time when Nebuchadnezzar was taking an oath of allegiance from Zedekiah, he was also engaged in hostilities against Elam. "We do not know," says Mr. Pinches, "what brought the Babylonians into hostilities with the Elamites, but the result of the expedition was to bring the whole kingdom of Elam within the boundaries of the Babylonian monarchy" (*Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archæology*, vii. 214).

Ver. 35.—**The bow of Elam.** So Isaiah in prophetic vision, "And Elam bare the quiver" (xxii. 6).

Ver. 36.—An emblem of the utter hopelessness of escape. **The four winds** (figuratively spoken of by Zechariah (vi. 5) as "presenting themselves" before God, to receive his commissions) shall combine their forces to scatter the doomed nation. **The outcasts of Elam.** This is the marginal reading in the Hebrew Bible; the text has, "the perpetual outcasts." No philological eye can doubt that the correction should be admitted (a *yod* for a *vav*).

Ver. 38.—**I will set my throne**; *i.e.* my tribunal (as ch. xliii. 10). **The king and the princes**; rather, *king and princes*. The threat is not merely that the reigning king shall be dethroned, but that Elam shall lose its native rulers altogether.

Ver. 39.—**But . . . in the latter days**; *i.e.* presumably in the Messianic age. Into the fulfilment of this promise we need not inquire in too prosaic a spirit. It is true that "Elamites" are mentioned among the persons present on the great "day of Pentecost" (Acts ii. 9). But this would be a meagre fulfilment indeed. The fact is that, both in the narrative in the Acts and in this prophecy, the Elamites are chiefly mentioned as representatives of the distant and less civilized Gentile nations, and the fulfilment is granted whenever a similar people to the Elamites is brought to the knowledge of the true religion.

[1] George Smith, 'History of Assurbanipal,' pp. 222—254.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*Israel's heirs.* "Hath he no heir?" Most wonderful is the preservation of the Jews as a distinct race amid the strangest vicissitudes of fortune and through centuries of exile—surviving the devastating deluge of the successive Oriental monarchies, the captivity in Babylon, the cruelties of Antiochus Epiphanes, the sweep of Roman

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conquest, the persecution of the Middle Ages, and the cosmopolitan citizenship of our own day. Yet, much as Israel has contributed to the philosophy and trade of the modern world, and great as her future mission may yet be, we cannot blind ourselves to the fact that her lonely glory of religious pre-eminence has passed away. Others have entered into this proud inheritance.

I. THE INHERITANCE. 1. *The knowledge of the true God.* This, and not the land flowing with milk and honey, was the chief treasure of Israel's inheritance. When all neighbouring nations were following polytheism, idol-worship, and immoral rites, Israel was led by prophetic voices to look to one God—a spiritual presence who could only be worshipped "in the beauty of holiness." That people, therefore, which has the highest knowledge of God, and the purest religious life and worship, will be the true heir of this part of the ancient possession of the Jews. 2. *The mission to enlighten the heathen.* The Jew was not called to his privileged position wholly for his own sake. He was an elect people that he might be an apostle to the world; that in him there might be developed the revelation of truth which was for the healing of all the nations; that he might cultivate, preserve, transmit, and disseminate this abroad. His was the proud mission of the torch-bearer to the nations that sat in darkness, that through his light they might see their light and life. This mission was often ignored, and it was never perfectly developed in Old Testament times; but the work of Jonah and Daniel, and the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah concerning the heathen, are partial accomplishments of it. It waited till Christ came for its full exercise. Then the Jew became the missionary of the gospel. The faith of the new age was given to the world by Jew-apostles.

II. THE HEIRS. If the Jew has lost his proud religious pre-eminence, who has become his heir? 1. *The Christian is the heir of the Jew's knowledge of the true God.* He and he alone, whether he be of the stock of Shem, of Ham, or of Japheth, is the true Israelite, the "royal priesthood," etc. For Christianity is the fulfilment and perfection of the Jewish faith (Matt. v. 17—20). In the New Testament we see a higher knowledge of God, a more spiritual worship, a more devoted service. If this be true, to reject it and rest contented with the lower faith of the Old Testament must be to give way in the race. 2. *The most Christian missionary is the truest heir to Israel's mission to evangelize the world.* If there be any one race upon whom the mantle of Israel has fallen, may we not think that this is the great English-speaking peoples of Britain and America? Such an inheritance is not to be made out by ingenious arguments about the fate of the lost ten tribes. If we were the descendants of those apostate Israelites, we should be none the better for the fact, nor are we under any disadvantage because the hypothesis of an Israelite origin proves to be groundless. To make much of such a point is to go back to the lower conceptions of Judaism, and to disregard the higher spiritual conditions of Christianity. The true heir of Israel is the possessor of Israel's faith in its full development. It is not our birth and descent, but our personal religion, that can secure the inheritance to us.

Ver. 7.—*The failure of wisdom.* Edom, the country of Job, the haunt of ancient lore, is to find that her learning and science will prove no safeguard against the deluge of destruction that is about to burst over the nations. The disaster which fell upon ancient "wise men" of the East may be a warning to the higher intelligences of all ages. The failure of wisdom is twofold—negative and positive.

I. NEGATIVE: THERE ARE EVILS WITH WHICH WISDOM CANNOT COPE. 1. *Physical.* Science can do much to avoid troubles into which ignorance falls, to mitigate inevitable disasters, and to devise means of escape from those which are already present. Sanitary science will help to prevent disease, and medical science to cure it. Military science will put a country in a certain state of security; economical science will check dangers of poverty. But how many of the worst things in life are beyond the power of science! The philosopher cannot arrest the hand of the invader. The most terrible diseases are the most fatal. Men have long since given up the vain search for the elixir of life. Science is powerless before death. 2. *Moral.* Still less can science "minister to the mind diseased." What consolation is a knowledge of the processes of a malady to the mourner, the light of whose eyes is darkened for ever by its fatal work? What comfort can science whisper to the widow and the orphan? The great burden of the

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world's sorrow, and the weariness of the unceasing cares of life, it does not so much as touch. The deeper evil of sin flows in a foul, black stream, unchecked by science. The mission of science is great and glorious, and we should be profoundly thankful that we live in an age when its bright torch confers many a boon and relieves many a trouble. But we must not ignore the fact that the greatest ills that flesh is heir to are just those which it cannot cure.

II. POSITIVE: THERE ARE EVILS WHICH WISDOM INVOKES UPON ITS OWN HEAD. Knowledge is good and Divine, and in itself a blessing of the first order. Yet it brings a snare, and the abuse of it terrible disasters. 1. The *knowledge of inevitable evil only increases distress.* "Where ignorance is bliss," etc. 2. Superior wisdom may engender *pride.* Hence arises a false sense of security which only increases danger. The wise man is slow to tread those lowly paths which lead to true rest. It is difficult for him to become as a little child, that he may enter into the kingdom of heaven. 3. *Wisdom may come to be trusted to for help that it cannot afford.* Men make an idol of science, as though it were a new evangel. The ultimate disappointment must correspond to the grossness of the delusion. We must learn, therefore, while avoiding a foolish depreciation of science and philosophy, to look still for our safety and blessedness to that higher wisdom of God, that gospel of the Crucified, which is still to some as foolishness.

Ver. 11.—*A promise for orphans and widows.* I. GOD BRINGS SOME MITIGATION TO THE SEVEREST CALAMITY. The merciful assurance of care for the helpless sufferers occurs in the midst of a stern denunciation of doom upon Edom, as a strange and startling relief to the terrible words that follow and precede. Here is a rift in the cloud through which a sunbeam of Divine love falls upon the dark scene of judgment. The thunderstorm of God's wrath never so covers the whole heavens that no ray of mercy can penetrate to the wretched sufferers. Behind the stern frown there is always the melting heart of Divine pity. God's anger is the anger of love, not that of hatred. Wherever it is possible to give relief he will do so.

II. WHEN GOD SENDS TROUBLE HE ALSO SENDS A DELIVERANCE. Possibly the trouble is beyond escape; for a season it must be endured; but in the end there is a Divine salvation for those who will seek it aright. Repeatedly denunciations of woe against some guilty nation are followed by the promise that "in the latter day" God "will bring again the captivity" of it (*e.g.* ch. xlvi. 26; xlviii. 47; ver. 39). The promise to Edom of the preservation of the children implies a future for the race. The widows and children are helpless sufferers, and it is for these alone that the deliverance is promised. God has peculiar pity on the most needy.

III. ORPHANS AND WIDOWS HAVE SPECIAL ENCOURAGEMENTS TO LOOK FOR HELP FROM GOD. If such a merciful promise as that of our text is made to a heathen nation, how much more assurance may the people of God feel! and if it is given to the families of the wicked and in the midst of the sentence of punishment, how much more must it apply to the families of true Christians! God is "a Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of widows" (Ps. lxviii. 5); "He relieveth the fatherless and widows" (Ps. cxlvi. 9); "He will establish the border of the widow" (Prov. xv. 25). If God numbers the hairs of our head, will he neglect our children? If they who are desolate indeed cry unto him, can the All-merciful neglect *their* prayer?

IV. GOD'S PROMISES FOR ORPHANS AND WIDOWS SHOULD ENCOURAGE FAITH IN HIM. 1. *The father should trust his children to God.* That is a terrible moment when the strong man feels the sentence of death within him, and bows his head, knowing that he must leave his helpless ones behind. Yes, *must* leave them. Then let him leave them to God. Here is a call to resignation and to trust. The promise is in a measure conditioned by it. If the dying man would have his little ones cared for when they are set adrift on the cold, homeless world, let him entrust them to God. Such a trust will never be broken. But if he refuse to do this, *he* cannot complain should they suffer harm after he has gone. 2. *The widow must trust for herself.* "Let thy widows trust in me." The children may be too young to seek refuge in God. Their father must do this for them. But the widow must exercise her own faith. Her husband's faith will not avail for her. Let her trust, and then, but not till then, she shall find her consolation in the great Comforter.

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Ver. 16.—*A people deceived by its own terribleness.* I. THEY WHO ARE A TERROR TO ALL HUMAN FOES MUST ULTIMATELY TREMBLE BEFORE SPIRITUAL FOES. Edom was to fall before Babylon, in spite of her terrible aspect. Much more must the fierce, proud sinner succumb to the unseen angel of Divine judgment. The rocks that keep back an army cannot retard the onrush of the heavenly host.

II. THEY WHO NOW STAND HIGHEST IN PRIDE AND POWER WILL FALL LOWEST AT THE FINAL JUDGMENT. Rank, social position, honour, influence, will then count for nothing. Pride may have sat high as the eagle in its eyrie, but "every one that exalteth himself shall be abased;" "The first shall be last."

III. THEY WHO POSSESS EARTHLY GREATNESS ARE IN DANGER OF DELUDING THEMSELVES WITH AN UNWARRANTABLE TRUST IN IT. Such cities as the rock-hewn Petra, and Bozrah seated on her lofty hill, would seem by natural position impregnable. Consequently their inhabitants would grow insolent and proud, and thus deserve the more that fate which their natural resources could not avert, and their self-confidence would prevent them from mitigating. Worldly resources are dangers when they lead us to forsake the true Refuge in order to trust in them. The rich and great are not the more secure for their privileges, and they will be the less safe if they lean upon them when without them they would seek help in God.

Ver. 29.—"*Fear on every side.*" This is a sadly familiar phrase of Jeremiah's. It is frequently applicable. The causes of alarm are numerous; so are the sufferers.

I. FEAR IS AN EVIL. It is not only the shadow of future calamity; it is evil itself—evil even if it is not justified by the event. 1. It is *distressing.* 2. It is *degrading*—debasing the mind, crushing out all that is noble and unselfish. 3. It is *paralyzing.* Under the influence of fear we are confused and helpless; all energy is gone.

II. THERE ARE MANY OCCASIONS OF FEAR. Jeremiah frequently exclaims, "Fear on *every* side!" We know not how many dangers surround us—political, social, domestic, personal; dangers to property, family, health, and life. The wonder is that they who have no refuge above themselves are so complacent. Such unwarrantable calmness must be traced to moral dulness rather than to true courage. For how truly terrible is the condition of the sinner! The laws of the universe are against him. If he flees from this life new horrors await him in the dread unknown land.

III. THE DEEPEST SOURCE OF FEAR IS OUR OWN SIN. 1. This brings the greatest *danger* upon us—the penalty of outraged justice and broken law. 2. This awakens the *feeling* of terror. Conscience makes cowards of us all.

IV. IN GOD IS THE REFUGE FROM FEAR. Men fear God in their guilt. Yet it is he who alone can deliver them from fear, (1) by *removing the evil* feared; (2) or by *strengthening them* to endure it; and also (3) by *calming the troubled soul* as one whom his mother comforteth. It is well that we should feel fear on every side if it leads us to cry, "What must we do to be saved?" and then to hear and follow the gospel answer, "Trust to the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The paradox of Israel's inheritance.* The fittingness of this prediction is very striking. It is Ammon, the appropriator of Gad, who is the special subject of it.

I. ITS UNLIKELIHOOD. At the time the prediction was uttered appearances were completely against it. The original promise seemed doomed to failure. The flower and hope of Israel was in exile, and the land lay desolate. Interlopers reaped the benefit of their misfortunes, and seized upon portions of the unoccupied land. In the history of Christianity there may be perceived remarkable correspondences. Vast spaces of the civilized world have lost the spiritual traditions of the gospel in which once they gloried, and vaster regions still amongst the heathen are occupied by ancient faiths that offer a steady and powerful opposition to the missionary efforts of the Church. Yet the whole earth has been promised to the Church of Christ. The utmost zeal, devotion, and watchfulness are needed in order to prevent the inroads of worldliness and unbelief. At times the despairing cry may be heard, "Where is the hope of his coming?

II. THE METHOD OF ITS REALIZATION. It is well to ponder these facts in the light

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of God's Word, for it suggests an escape from the perplexity they occasion. Where the induction of the natural reason fails to render a hopeful explanation, the Spirit of God sheds an unthought-of light. Jeremiah's interpretation, viz. *that present dispossession need not mean utter disinheritance*, is full of spiritual light and comfort. This impression is deepened and confirmed when he seals it with prophetic certainty and declares that *Israel shall be heir to his heirs.* But still remains the mystery to be solved: 1. *How this will take place.* Israel seems all but annihilated, or in danger of absorption into heathen nations, and his land is unoccupied. But according to promise (1) a seed shall be preserved and shall be restored; and (2) through the "seed of David," viz. Christ, a new Israel will be created, in spiritual succession to the ancient people of God, and destined to redeem from heathenism not only Palestine but the whole earth. 2. *What will this involve?* It will involve (1) the judgment and overthrow of Israel's neighbours, especially such as Ammon, the traditional "land-thief" of his border; (2) the purification and discipline of Israel as the heir of the kingdom of God; and (3) the conversion of many "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev. v. 9). In this sense also will God "bring again the captivity" of Moab, of Elam, and even of Ammon. 3. The following *lessons* are clearly taught by this prophecy, viz.:—(1) *A unity of purpose pervades the vicissitudes of Israel's and the world's history:* (2) *human affairs are governed by a strict and never-failing justice;* and (3) *a happy future awaits the children of faith—the spiritual Israel—even on earth.*—M.

Ver. 7 (cf. Obad. 8; Isa. xix. 11; xxxiii. 18).—"*Where is the wise?*" Edom, celebrated for its wisdom from of old (Obad. 8; Job xi. 11; Baruch iii. 22, 23), had secured itself in inaccessible fastnesses of the mountains, dwelling in rock-hewn cities. Eliphaz was a Temanite. It was chiefly in international relations that the skill or subtlety of the Idumæans displayed itself. Their diplomacy was full of craft and falsehood, and could not be relied upon. Their wisdom was essentially of this world—cold, calculating, and unscrupulous. Of this it is predicted by Jeremiah that it shall be brought to nought. How did his prophecy fulfil itself? In relation to the kingdom of God.

I. IT FAILED TO OVERTURN IT. The Edomites watched the signs of the times, and sided with what promised to be the strongest power, and in the last resort trusted to their own inaccessible position. Their ambassadors were amongst those of neighbouring nations who came to Zedekiah to advise united resistance to Nebuchadnezzar (ch. xxvii. 3); yet they triumphed over the prostrate city when it was captured by the Chaldeans (Lam. iv. 2; Ezek. xxxv. 15; xxxvi. 5; Ps. cxxxvii. 7). Their country had been tributary to Israel under David, but, taking advantage of the Chaldean invasion, they appropriated much of the territory of Israel proper, and extended their territory to the Mediterranean. The same spirit seems to have actuated its remote descendants, the Idumæan princes of the Herodian line. Herod the Great "slaughtered the innocents" in hope of destroying the Christ, but was circumvented by the providence of God; and his son Antipas was the Herod before whom Christ appeared by arrangement with Pilate (Luke xxiii. 12). In the later years of Christ's ministry the Herodians were constantly opposed to him, and plotted with the Pharisees against him. So God has defeated the continual antagonism of worldly men, guarding the residue of his Church, and evolving new generations of faith and fresh conquests of truth from the apparent failures and ruins of the past.

II. IT FAILED TO SECURE PERMANENT ADVANTAGE TO ITSELF. The prophet declares that it was to drink of the same cup as Israel, but it is not certain as to whether Nebuchadnezzar, or Alexander the Great, or other conquerors are alluded to. 1. The movement westward of the Idumæan power, during the Babylonian exile, was the occasion of its overthrow. The Nabathæan Arabs, ruling a large part of Arabia, seized upon Petræa, and settled down as its occupants. These were in turn conquered by the Romans. In time the country fell under Mohammedan misrule, and lapsed into permanent desolation early in the Christian era. The rock-cities of Petræa are amongst the most striking monuments of fulfilled prophecy. 2. The same fate has overtaken all the empires that set themselves against the kingdom of God. Their history is a series of dissolving views. Failing to overthrow it, they have themselves been over-

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thrown. And the wisdom which could not subvert has equally shown itself unable to assimilate the "wisdom that cometh from above." The reason for all this is contained in the crowning proof of its folly, viz. that—

III. IT HAS FAILED TO UNDERSTAND IT. Had the Idumæans known the might of a spiritual religion, they would not have leagued against Israel. Had the Herodians known the wisdom of God, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. ii. 8; Acts iii. 17; vii. 51). Had Rome known the power of the truth, it would never have corrupted the religion of the cross, and thus prepared for its own disintegration and decay in the Middle Ages, and the manifold complications of worldly religion in modern times. The whole conception of God's kingdom—its spirituality, other-worldliness, and purity—is still a strange thing to the wise men of the world. But it continues to grow and to realize itself amongst men; and it is destined to fill the whole earth, absorbing and assimilating its ancient antagonists; for "he must reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. xv. 25).—M.

Ver. 12 (cf. ch. xxv. 29; Prov. xi. 31; 1 Pet. iv. 18; and, for original, Obad. 16).—*Israel's judgment an argument for Edom's.* I. AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE CHARACTER OF GOD. 1. *Proving his strict righteousness.* There is no respect of persons. His love for righteousness and hatred of wrong are such that even his chosen people do not escape punishment. Salvation will not, therefore, be by favour or independent of character. The least sin will be judged. Individual saints shared in the general calamity. 2. *His unfailing faithfulness.* It was predicted particularly concerning Israel, and was declared as the law of his kingdom. Its fulfilment, therefore, vindicates the Divine veracity.

II. AN ARGUMENT BASED UPON IT. If such a God reigns amongst men, can any transgressor escape? To such sinners, then, as the Edomites, the heathen or worldly enemies of godliness and the truth: 1. *Punishment would be certain.* Their present immunity was only as the lull before the storm. Conscience gathers no comfort from apparent prosperity. Israel's punishment is a certain guarantee of Edom's. 2. *Punishment will be proportional to the sin.* In such cases as that of Edom—an open, flagrant, and conscious foe to the kingdom of God—it would be far more severe. There is no promise of "bringing again their captivity." It was to be "as if it had not been." Where the heathen, on the other hand, have not sinned so clearly against light, there will be condoning circumstances which will be taken into account.—M.

Ver. 23.—*The unrest of the wicked.* Isaiah (xvii. 12, 13; cf. lvii. 20, 21) uses the same figure of Damascus, and Jeremiah must, therefore, have either borrowed it from him or from some common source. It is possible that the figure was a common expression amongst the Jews of the time. The neighbourhood of Damascus and its associated cities was always a populous one, with a varied nationality and conflicting interests and affinities. From its character there was no religious unity, and its position exposed it to dangers on every hand, especially from Babylon and Egypt. It was a motley people, with vast commercial relations and strong tendency to pleasure, but no religious earnestness or capacity of moral influence or initiation. This is another of those phases of the world-spirit which Jeremiah paints in his panorama of the nations' judgment.

I. THE UNREST OF WORLD-LIFE IS LIKENED TO THAT OF THE SEA. 1. *Continual.* 2. *Vast and tumultuous.* 3. *Not to be stilled.* 4. *Sad and ruinous in its effects.*

II. BECAUSE THE WORLDLY THEMSELVES ARE LIKE THE SEA. 1. *Unstable.* How easily ruffled! Uncertain, irresolute (Jas. i. 6), subject to sudden panics. This is moral and spiritual. 2. *With no central controlling power.* The very constitution of the sea renders storms sudden and terrible. So it is with the sinner's character. There is no central controlling influence; no moral principle or spiritual power. True calm comes from within. He of the Galilean sea can alone tranquillize the troubled nation or the alarmed sinner.—M.

Ver. 1.—*Might not right.* Ammon had taken possession of the territory of Israel (cf. chapter). Had done so as if it were his right, as if they were the lawful heirs of the land. Because of this judgment is denounced against them. They are to learn that might is not right.

I. THERE MAY BE RIGHT WITHOUT MIGHT. It was so with Israel at this time. Is so

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with the true Church of God. "All things are yours"—so we are told, but it is only *de jure*, not *de facto*. But—

II. THERE MAY BE MIGHT WITHOUT RIGHT. In the case here given. And it is common enough. Perfect justice is not attainable in this life. Even in the little world of the home, the school, the Church, injustices will occur. And, painful as they are to witness and to bear, they have to be borne. It is hard sometimes to see the justice of the Divine ways; how much more, then, of human ways! Nevertheless—

III. MIGHT MAY BE RIGHT. "La carrière aux talents," said Napoleon—that was to be the law of his empire. "The tools to him who can use them"—such is our common maxim. The "king," the ruler, the lord paramount of the state, what is he but—if the etymology be correct—the "can"-ning man, the man who can, the able man? And so not seldom when we see might, we see right too. In the colonization of lands inhabited by savages who are letting the capabilities of glorious territories lie unimproved or running to waste, such colonization is not wrong. Might is right. "The tools," etc. It is a stern law to the incapable, but a just and beneficent one for the human race. "Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him that hath ten talents" (Matt. xxv. 28); what is this but the sanction of this combination? "To him that hath shall be given." There we have it once more. But—

IV. GOD'S WILL IS, AND OURS SHOULD BE, TO GIVE MIGHT TO RIGHT. Right one day shall be might as well as right. 1. *This is the burden of the promises of God* in his Word. "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done"—the will that is ever-righteous—"on earth," etc. 2. *The constitution of human nature* is in favour of it (cf. Butler's 'Analogy'). 3. *Conscience ever takes the side* of right, whatever our conduct may do or be. 4. And *God's providence is slowly working to this end.* 5. "*Faith*" *is simply the giving ourselves up to the righteous One*, to be "his faithful servant and soldier, and to fight manfully under his banner until our lives shall end."

CONCLUSION. Let us seek to be on the side of *right* always, let the cost be what it may.—C.

Ver. 8.—*Desirable habitations: a new year's sermon.* "Dwell deep, O inhabitants of Dedan." The prophet is foretelling the calamities that are to come on the different heathen nations who dwelt around the land of God's people, and from whom they, at various times, had received sore wrong and harm. The Edomites—the descendants of Esau—were the traditional foes of Israel, and it is they who in all probability are referred to. The country they inhabited was full of rocks, cliffs, deep gorges in the sides of which were many all but inaccessible caves. The rocky dwellings of Edom have been often told of—how they served as an almost impenetrable fortress for the robber bands which mostly inhabited them. But now vengeance was to come on these people, and the prophet is bidding them betake themselves in flight to the far-off desert, or to hide themselves in the deep recesses of their rocky caves, and there, if possible, safely dwell. "Dwell deep . . . Dedan" (cf. also ver. 30). For disaster was threatening Hazor also. The ruthless King of Babylon would fall on them in his march westwards to Egypt, and well would it be for them if the forests and caverns, the lofty rocks and the deep valleys of their rugged land should provide them with secure retreat. It was in such hidden caves that David, during much of his fugitive life when hunted by Saul "like a partridge upon the mountains," so often found refuge. And this fact he is for ever commemorating in his psalms by calling God his Rock, his Refuge, his Hiding-place, his Fortress, his Secret Place. And the history of these lands tells once and again of the devices of military commanders to dislodge the inhabitants of these almost inaccessible retreats. Herod, so Josephus tells, caused a number of huge timber boxes to be made, in which stood armed soldiers, and these were lowered down the precipitous sides of the cliffs in which the robber caverns were until they reached the cavern mouths. Then, rushing in, they would massacre the inhabitants, or else by huge hooks drag them forth and then hurl them down to the dread depths beneath. But generally these hidden habitations proved secure refuges for those who dwelt in them, and it is to this fact that the prophet refers. He is bidding them betake themselves thither, for danger was at hand—a relentless foe was threatening them. Now, the like exhortation may be addressed to us; for for us there are provided strong habitations unto which we may continually resort, sure refuges in which we may safely hide, Divine

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retreats in the deep recesses of which we may securely dwell. Therefore we would say—

I. DWELL DEEP IN THE LOVE OF GOD. For the firm faith of the love that God hath toward us will be found to be a shelter, a solace, and a strength, such as nought else can render. St. John says concerning that love, "We know and have believed the love that God hath towards us." Yes; sometimes we can clearly see it, we know and feel it. God's providence, God's grace, God's Word, are all filled and flooded with it. But there are other times when we cannot say we know, but only that we *believe* the love that, etc.—when providence seems adverse, when our path is rough and beset with thorns, when those you trusted prove treacherous and your own friends turn against you, when your home is left desolate and dark clouds of anxiety gather heavy and thick over you. But those times are made far less fearful for us if we will but dwell, dwell deep, in the love of God. It was through this ever-cherished home of his soul that our Lord was able to endure so calmly and to meet with such meek majesty and Divine dignity the unspeakable sorrow of his earthly lot. Often did the tempter seek to drag him forth from that secure retreat by his mocking suggestion, "If thou *be* the Son of God," etc. But he tried in vain. Dwelling deep in the love of God, that inaccessible refuge, that sure retreat, he looked forth upon the path he had to tread and the cross he had to bear, and he could endure the one and despise the other in the might of that love in which he ever abode. And it is well that we should dwell where he dwelt, and so be blest as he was blest. And not a few of his people have done so—Abraham, David, Daniel, Paul, and myriads more, as God grant we may likewise.

II. DWELL DEEP IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE. For no surer aid to our obeying the former exhortation can be given than our obedience to this. And yet there are few books of importance that are neglected as the Scriptures are, notwithstanding the invaluable help which such knowledge has imparted and must ever impart. What is the hundred and nineteenth psalm but one long panegyric on the blessedness of this knowledge of the Word of God? And he who knows what the Word of God can do for his soul will deem no praise too extravagant, no admiration and love too enthusiastic. Oh to be mighty in the Scriptures! for that is to be mighty through them, capable and ready for all God's will. The dark problems of life cease to dismay; the mysteries which meet us on every side cannot shake our faith; we become open-eyed to signs and tokens of God's love which otherwise we should not see. Integrity and uprightness preserve us, and we run the way of God's commandments, because God, by means of them, hath enlarged our heart. It is this prayerful habitual study of God's Word which is dwelling deep therein, and which is so fruitful of good to all that will so dwell.

III. DWELL DEEP IN THE FELLOWSHIP OF CHRIST. Cherish and guard with a holy care that communion with him which is the joy and strength of our souls. A sure test of the value of any spiritual aid is given us in the intensity of the opposition which Satan offers to our use of such aid. Now, measured by this standard it is difficult to over-estimate the value of this communion with Christ in which we say, "Dwell deep." This is not easy to do. For persistent indeed are the endeavours which Satan makes to destroy this communion. Who that kneels in prayer is ignorant of these endeavours?—thoughts wandering; desires earth-bound; faith feeble; love cold. Hence many neglect prayer, or they become formal in it. But there can be no real communion with Christ without this. Therefore we must rouse ourselves to earnestness. Pray that we may pray. Kneel down again and pray once more our as yet unprayed prayer. Let us resolve we will not be conquered. Encourage ourselves by remembering that the very difficulties we meet are evidences of the truth of true prayer. And that such difficulties can be overcome; for they have been. And not only by prayer, but by walking with Christ in obedience and sympathy and love.—C.

Ver. 11.—*Consolation for a father's dying bed.* Perhaps there is no greater sorrow than is suggested here—the husband and father leaving widow and helpless children apparently without a friend to support or aid them. If it were not for the beatific vision of God, the perfect persuasion of his wisdom and power and love, which the blessed dead enjoy, they would be entreating God piteously to allow them to return hither once more, and to shelter their loved ones from the cruel hardships of this

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pitiless world. We wonder, sometimes, how it is possible for a loving mother who was wont to lavish her heart's deepest, tenderest affection upon her children, to find joy and to be happy in heaven, whither she has been suddenly translated, leaving her husband and children heart-broken at losing her. Here she could never be happy without her children. How can she be happy there and they yet here? Because she is at the fountain of all love, from which all her love was but a rill; she is with God, who *is* Love, and who she knows will deal only in the best of ways—ways far better than she herself could have devised, for those who are now weeping over her grave, and missing and mourning her every hour of the day. Now, of those told of in this verse we note—

I. THAT TO LEAVE THEM TO GOD IS ALL WE CAN DO. We may and we ought to make provision for them to the best of our power. That is but a spurious and miserable travesty of faith in God which would neglect all such aids as life insurance and the like, on the ground that making such provision shows distrust and unbelief in God. Some speak thus, but they speak foolishly. Might we not as well refuse to work for our daily bread, on the ground that it is written, "My God shall supply all your need"? But who does not know that God's way of supplying our need is by giving us strength to work and minds to think, enduing us with the means of gaining our bread? And is it not so in this case also? Would not a man be most wrong who, because of what is here said, neglected to make all due provision in his power? But having done this, like Jacob and Joseph, we may safely leave our children, as they did, to the care of God, confident that he will care for them according to his word.

II. AND GOD HONOURS SUCH TRUST. As a fact, and a very interesting one it is, how wonderfully such bereaved children and widows are cared for! How God raises up one friend here and another there, and probably, if a comparison could be made, it would be found that such children have been as well cared for as any others; life has been as bright to them as for those whose earlier years were clouded over by no such sore bereavement. There may be exceptions, but the rule is surely for God to honour such trust. Can he who has said, "Ask, and ye shall receive," refuse the prayer of a believing man at such a time?

III. AND IT IS A REASONABLE TRUST. What would we desire more for our children than that they should be cared for by such a one who, so far as man can be, is like God?—having the power and the will, the knowledge and wisdom, and, above all, the love, which are in God. Who would not crave for our dear ones a guardian like that?

IV. THE CONDITIONS OF THE TRUST are that he who is about to leave behind widow and children should be himself one who trusts in God; that he have trained his children in the ways of the Lord, and sought to make his home a godly home. Verily such shall have their reward, yonder in heaven and here on earth, and especially at that supreme moment when he has to leave his loved ones and to lie down and die. Then for him shall the faith of this promise be precious indeed.—C.

Ver. 16.—*Vain confidences.* "Thy terribleness hath deceived thee," etc. Taking the different expressions in this verse, we can see how such confidences are begotten in men's minds.

I. THEIR FELLOW-MEN HELP TO DECEIVE THEM. "Thy terribleness," etc. All around them held them in terror, were afraid of them, deemed them too mighty to be overcome. And the consciousness of this kept in them a confidence which now was to be shown to be but vain.

II. MEN'S OWN PRIDE. "The pride of thine heart." What myriads has not pride slain! what woe hath it not brought upon mankind! "Pride goeth before destruction," etc. (Cf. homily on *Pride*, ch. xlviii. 29.) See Sennacherib's army (Isa. xxxvii.), Pharaoh's overthrow (Exod. xiv.); and "all the ages all along" pride has done the like and does so still.

III. MEN'S CIRCUMSTANCES. No dwellings could seem more secure than were theirs; their fortress seemed impregnable. Hence they "said in their hearts," "We shall never be moved." (Cf. on these dwellings, introduction to homily on *Desirable habitations, supra*, ver. 8.) Cf. the rich fool (Luke xii. 20). Prosperity and security do tend to beget these vain confidences.

IV. PAST SUCCESS. Not only did these Edomites dwell in the clefts of the rock, but they had *held them fast* hitherto against all invaders. A career of success, opponents

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vanquished, difficulties surmounted, wealth and honour won; who can persuade such a man to call himself a poor, lost sinner, dependent utterly on the mercy of God? It is much easier to say, "Have mercy on us miserable sinners," than to feel and believe we are so.

CONCLUSION. There are two ways in which this spirit of false confidence may be got rid of or kept under. 1. *By surrender of the soul to Christ.* He makes us like himself, forms his Spirit in us, so that the truer the surrender the more we become "meek and lowly in heart" as he was. This the best way, the easy yoke, the light burden. 2. *By the crushing force of God's judgments.* Edom was to be humbled thus. And there are many who will only be humbled so. They will have their own way, and they have it for their woe, and then, after a weary while, they come to themselves. They "made their bed in hell," and as they made it so they had to lie upon it, until even there God's hand shall find them, and they shall humble themselves beneath the mighty hand they had heretofore dared to defy. 3. *And in some way this humility must be wrought in us.* For God *will* have all men to be saved; but without this lowly mind, this rejection of all vain confidences, we cannot be. Which way, then, shall it be—through Christ or through the fire of hell?—C.

Ver. 23.—*Lessons from the sea.* "There is sorrow on the sea; it cannot be quiet." We must remember that the sea to the Jew of old time was an object of almost unmixed terror. Nearly all the allusions in the Bible tell of its power and peril, never of its preciousness and value to man. The Jews were a non-seafaring people; they dreaded it. In Deut. xxviii. 68 the being taken back to Egypt in ships is held out as a great threatening. They had no seaport worth mentioning. For centuries their seaboard was held by the Philistines. All their conceptions of it relate to its hurtful and destructive power (cf. Ps. cvii., "They that go down to the sea in ships," etc.; cf. also histories of the Deluge, Exodus, Jonah). The epithets applied to it are never pleasing, but all more or less terrible. It is "raging," "roaring," "troubled," "breaking ships of Tarshish." Hezekiah failed to construct a navy. And hence St. John (Rev. xxi. 1), when telling of the beauty, the glory, and the joy of the new heavens and the new earth, is careful to add, "And there was no more sea." Now, this ver. 23 is an illustration of this common Jewish feeling. But this Jewish feeling was a false one, though not so to them. For the sea is one of God's most blessed gifts to man. Life would be impossible without it. It has been justly called, "the life-blood of the land, as the blood is the life of the body. It is the vital fluid that animates our earth, and, should it disappear altogether, our fair green planet would become a heap of brown volcanic rocks and deserts, lifeless and worthless as the slag cast out from a furnace." We remember, too, how God said of the sea that it was "very good," and no mistaken Jewish ideas must be allowed to reverse that verdict. Think of: Its *vapours.* Each recurring harvest is really the harvest of the sea as much as of the land. For from the sea ascend those vapours which form the clouds and which descend in the fertilizing indispensable rain. Its *currents,* bearing along the sun-heated waters of sub-tropical climes, far away northward and southward, and giving to regions like our own that mild and on the whole beautiful climate which we enjoy, whereas but for these warm waters of the sea our shores would be bleak, inhospitable, barren, and all but uninhabitable, like the shores of Labrador. Its *breezes,* so health-giving, imparting fresh life to the sick and feeble. Its *beauty,* ever presenting some fresh form of loveliness in colour, movements, outline, brilliancy. Its *tides,* sweeping up the mouths of our great rivers and estuaries, and all along our shores, washing clean what else would be foul, stagnant, poisonous. Its *saltness,* ministering to the life of its inhabitants, retaining the warmth of the sun, and so aiding in the transmission of those currents spoken of above, preserving from corruption, etc. But these thoughts were not those of the Jew. To him the sea was a type of manifold ills, and he rejoiced to believe that in his eternal home there should be "no more sea." For it told of unrest, instability, painful mystery, afflictions, separation, and hence impossibility of intercourse and death. For all these the sea serves in the Scriptures as a symbol, as reference to the passages which speak of the sea will show. But it has its brighter teachings also. Note—

I. ITS WAVES. See them in their blithe merry-heartedness, their buoyant spring and rush, coming in landwards from out the far distance, gleaming and sparkling as they

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roll along, "clapping their hands" as David would say, praising God as they leap and bound in their joy. How often we have seen them coming in such fashion, long lines of them!—nearer and nearer they approach, the sea-breeze filling them with vigour, and the sunshine gleaming on them and adorning them with the most exquisite colouring, until at length the shelving shore stops them, and they fall over, and in masses of snow-white foam, with merry rush and roar, they dash up the beach, brightening everything they touch; and then, their strength all gone, they glide down the sands and hie away back to their ocean-home, to begin the same joyous career all over again. Now, surely this perpetual process suggests the *joyful vigour* of the sea. True, its waves lie broken on the beach, their spray scattered far and wide, and it would seem as if that were but a poor ending for such a career. But not heeding that at all, the waves just gather up their strength again, and, never knowing when they are beaten, return again and again to the charge. And does not this teach us *how we should meet rebuff and disappointment?* Not lie down and moan, but hie back again to the source of our strength once more, and then again to the work God has given us to do. They seem to say to us, "Never be discouraged; see us as we begin again after each rebuff, how we sparkle all the more that we are scattered and broken, and then go back to come on again. So do you. Hope continually, and praise God more and more."

II. ITS MISTS AND VAPOURS—its clouds and exhalations—they also have their lessons. How common these mists are all who know the sea know well. But in and by them the sea renders up her strength, pays her tribute to the heavens. But *how bountifully she is recompensed!* How comes it that the sea abides wholesome, that it is not the source of malaria, a deadly mass of waters, in which no plant or fish can live? And part of the reply is in the fact that those mists and vapours which ascend from the sea descend to the earth in rain and showers, and fill the springs and fountains, which are the sources of the rivers, which are the carriers into the sea-depths of those varied salts and other products which serve as ministers of health to the innumerable forms of life with which the sea abounds. Thus is the sea repaid for the tribute she renders to the heavens. And so these sea-mists teach the blessedness of rendering up to God all he asks for. Thy God commandeth thy strength. The recompense of the sea assures us how abundantly God will recompense all who obey this command. And they suggest *the sure way of deliverance from all inward evil.* They ascend from the sea, but they leave all its saltness behind; from the pools and lakes and from stagnant marsh, but they leave all their unhealthful, corrupting properties behind; and when they come back again in form of rain, they are sweet and wholesome and precious, to quench the thirst of man and beast, and to gladden the whole face of the earth. And so with ourselves. In ascending to God, in spiritual drawing near to him, we leave all our evil behind. God says to the waters, "Come up hither," and *they are cleansed in the coming.* And so he says to us, "Come up hither," and we, too, are cleansed in the coming. And when we come back our hearts and lives, our whole influence, will be healthful and salutary, a blessing to all with whom we have to do.

III. ITS TIDES. They teach *the power of the unseen.* Their mighty movements are all governed by a force imperceptible to our senses. And it is the unseen, the intangible, that which the senses cannot perceive—*thought*, which governs the world. They teach also the *gradualness of the religious life.* It is often hard to say, on looking at the sea, whether the tide ebbs or flows. You must compare it after a while with its present position, and then you shall know. And so it is with the religious life. There are no leaps and bounds, no great starts and strides, but gradual, slow, step by step—such is the Divine ordering. Now, hence a lesson: 1. *Of consolation.* We are not to write bitter things against ourselves because our advance is slow. 2. *Thankfulness.* No man can leap into hell any more than he can into fitness for heaven. God holds us very fast, and only very slowly will he let us go. 3. *Caution.* Judge not that all is well because of no sudden great change in you. There may be the gradual ebbing away. Are there now large portions of your life which the fear of God does not govern, though once it controlled them all? If so the tide *has* ebbed.

IV. THE DEPTHS of the sea tell of that complete putting away of our sin which God promises to us (cf. Micah vii. 19). God will utterly put them away, casting them, not near the shore, in the shallows, or in the tide-way, but in the depths, where they will be sunk out of sight and out of reach for ever.

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V. ITS SANDS. (Cf. ch. v. 22.) They teach how *God makes our weakness strong.* What more feeble than the sand? And yet by it the mighty sea is held in. "To them who have no might God increaseth strength." But what are we and the surroundings of our lives but weak, shifting, unstable as the sand? But God can so fill them with strength that they shall beat back the fierce waves which would overwhelm us. Then let us fear not. He who makes the weak sand a sure bar against the ocean's rage can and will make our weakness strong to triumph over all that would harm us. Such are some of the lessons of the sea.—C.

Ver. 24.—*The fall of Damascus; or, the lovely and the lovable lost.* Here and in Isaiah and Amos we have predictions of the overthrow of Damascus. "The burden of Damascus," says Isaiah. "Behold! Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap." Jeremiah likens the agitated minds of the multitude of her inhabitants to the unquiet sea—still not for one moment. And the cause of that unquietness is their sorrow at the desolations coming on them. *And yet she was no mean city.* No; she was distinguished indeed. The hearts of men, in all ages of the world, have been drawn to her, and are so still. For she was and is surpassingly lovely. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole land around, compared to the Paradise in which our first father was placed by God, and celebrated by every writer, sacred and secular, that has had occasion to speak of her or her history. "It is the oldest city in the world. Its fame begins with the earliest patriarchs and continues to modern times. While other cities of the East have risen and decayed, Damascus is still where and what it was. While Babylon is a heap in the desert, Nineveh buried beneath her mounds, and Tyre a ruin on the seashore, it remains what it is called in the prophecies of Isaiah, 'the head of Syria.' And ever since, down to our own days, its praise is celebrated. It was 'a predestinated capital.' Nor is it difficult to explain why its freshness has never faded through all its series of vicissitudes and wars." Men have ever loved it and love it still. As the traveller from the west climbs up and up the steep passes of the great Lebanon range, and at length nears their eastern side, there, on the summit of a cliff, high up above the plain beneath, he looks down on the city of Damascus. "At the foot of the cliff on which the beholder stands, a river bursts forth from the mountain in which it has had birth. That river, as if in a moment, scatters over the plain, through a circle of thirty miles, the verdure which had hitherto been confined to its single channel. It is like the bursting of a shell, the eruption of a volcano—but an eruption, not of death, but of life. Far and wide extends in front the level plain, its horizon bare, its lines of surrounding hills bare, all bare, far away on the road to Palmyra and Bagdad. In the midst of this plain lies at your feet the vast island of deep verdure, walnuts and apricots hanging above, corn and grass below." The river is its life. It is drawn out in watercourses and spread in all directions. For miles around it is a wilderness of gardens—gardens with roses among the tangled shrubberies, and with fruit on the branches overhead. Everywhere among the trees the murmur of unseen rivulets is heard. Even in the city, which is in the midst of the garden, the clear rushing of the current is a perpetual refreshment. Every dwelling has its fountain; and at night, when the sun has set behind Mount Lebanon, the lights of the city are seen flashing on the water. All travellers in all ages have paused to feast their eyes on the loveliness of the city as they first behold it from the cliffs of Lebanon. Abana and Pharpar still flash and gleam as they flow along amid her fragrant gardens and by her dark olive groves. Snow-capped Hermon and the rugged range of Lebanon still keep over her their wonted watch and ward. Hence she may well be taken as the symbol of all that is lovely and fair in outward life, all that is bright and beautiful in the moral nature of man. *But yet she fell,* and she has lost her place amongst the nations for ever. Thus she suggests to the thoughtful reader the heart-searching truth that *the lovely and the lovable may yet be lost*—those on whom Jesus, looking, loves them, because they are so lovable, may yet miss of the life that is eternal; and he may say, as he did to one of them, "One thing thou lackest." Observe, then—

I. THERE HAVE BEEN SOULS CHARACTERIZED BY MUCH THAT IS LOVELY AND LOVABLE, AND YET HAVE NOT ENTERED INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD. Read the history of Orpah. Then there was *that young ruler* to whom reference has already been made. And the many who flocked around our Saviour when he was here on

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earth, and *whom he likened to the stony-ground hearers.* They all had much that was excellent and good about them, but they failed to bring forth fruit unto life eternal.

II. AND THERE ARE MANY SUCH NOW. Were our Lord amongst us now, he would love them as he did him of whom the Gospel tells. They may be young in years; in the morning of life, fair and comely to look upon, vigorous and strong, well educated, intelligent, bright and clever, cultured themselves and loving refinement and culture in others; they may be possessed of very attractive moral qualities, amiable and kindly, ready to do a kind action and scorning to do a mean one, possessed of and deserving an honourable reputation, of unquestioned veracity, of high honour, modest and pure in word and deed, gentle and courteous in manner, unassuming, thoughtful of the feelings and wishes of others; parents and friends, family and neighbours, all speak well of them, and those who know them best honour and love them most. Now, there are thousands of such as these. They are loved and lovable; they must be so. And as we picture them to ourselves we almost shrink from saying that such may nevertheless miss of the kingdom of God; like Damascus in all that is externally beautiful, and yet, like her, come under the condemnation of God. It seems scarce believable, and yet in the face of God's Word what can we say? Nicodemus was one such, and yet our Lord told *him*, "Except a man be born again," etc. We would be as charitable as the Word of God—and if we were that would make us far more charitable than the most of us are—but we would not be more so, for that would be to be uncharitable and unfaithful both to God and to the souls of men. And therefore we say that a man may be all that is externally fair and lovable, and yet, like bright beautiful Damascus, come under the condemnation of God; lovely and lovable like him whom Jesus loved, and yet, because lacking the *one* thing, shut out—self shut out—from the kingdom of God. And observe—

III. THIS RULE OF GOD IS NOT ARBITRARY, BUT JUST AND INDISPENSABLE. For all that we have said may coexist along with the will alien from the will of God, the heart not yet truly surrendered to him. It was so in that typical instance of this character to whom we have so often referred. For when brought to the test he refused the will of God. For the proof of our loyalty to God is seen, *not* in the many things that we are and do which are in keeping with our own inclinations, but in those that we are ready to do when they involve a real taking up of the cross and contradict those inclinations. A cultured, refined disposition may lead us, out of regard to our own self-interest, to do and be that which wins for us the applause and favour of our fellow-men. It would be a pain and grief to us to be otherwise. All the commands of the moral law we may have kept from our youth up, and hence conclude, and others —even Christ's disciples—may think also, that we lack nothing. And in fact we may lack nothing but that one thing without which all else is vain and useless for our admission into the kingdom of God. *But in that kingdom the will of God must be paramount,* or it ceases to be the kingdom of God. Suppose one of the heavenly bodies could choose, and did so, to swerve at times from its appointed orbit, and to take a course of its own; the whole universe would be thrown out of order, and confusion and destruction must ensue. Suppose one string of harp, one pipe of organ, instead of giving its proper note, were to resolve to utter a sound different from that which was appointed for it; what jarring discord must result! no true music could such harp or organ give. And so in God's kingdom, if there be one discordant will, how can the harmony and peace and blessedness of heaven any longer exist? If in our homes the law of the house be violated by any one of its members, how little would such a household deserve the sweet name of home! *For the good of all,* therefore, and not for any arbitrary reason, one law, one will, must be paramount. It is so in our earthly homes; it must yet more be so in the home of God, the kingdom of heaven. The heart, the will, *must* be surrendered to God if we are to be at last numbered amongst the inhabitants of God's eternal home.

IV. WHAT, THEN, SHALL WE SAY TO SUCH? Shall we bid you set light store by those varied qualities which draw forth the affection and esteem of your fellow-men? Shall we say—Care nothing for that which, when Jesus looked upon, even he could not but love? Still less shall we say that all these things are of the nature of sin. On the contrary, we would say—*Give God thanks for these things.* For, indeed, it is of his great mercy that you have been led to approve of them, and to turn away with disgust

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and abhorrence from that which is contrary thereto. Why were you made to hear God's voice?—for it was his voice which called you, and his hand which led you to this good choice. Without doubt the parents of that young ruler gave God thanks again and again when they saw the character of their son unfolding and developing in all such high-minded, pure, and amiable ways. And when we see the like in our children, do we not, ought we not to, give thanks likewise? What, then, do we say to you but this?—(1) *Render thanks to God* that he has thus inclined your heart; and then (2) go on to ask him who has been so good to you thus far that he will be more gracious still, and *give you that one thing which yet you lack*—the new heart, the perfectly surrendered will, the faith in God of which such surrender is the chief expression. Remember that the merchantman who became the happy owner of the pearl of great price was not content with the many goodly pearls after which he had been seeking and which he had already attained. No; but when he saw that pure, all-precious, lustrous pearl, he resolved that that should be his, and hence all was surrendered that he might make it his own. Now, you resemble him in two out of the three great facts of his history. Like him, you have sought and found many goodly pearls. The goodly pearls of moral excellence, virtue, amiability, many things lovely and of good report. You prize these things, as you ought to do. You have sought after them and have found them. And now, again, like that merchantman, there is shown and offered to you that pearl which is more precious than all—even the gift of God, which is Jesus Christ, the eternal salvation which comes to us alone through him. Yes, that *is* offered to you—that gift of the regenerated nature, that new heart and right spirit, which they who come to Christ receive. But now, in *the third and chief point of all*, would that you resembled that merchantman. He was willing to part with all he had for the sake of the pearl of great price. Are you? To persuade hereto we add two words. 1. The first by way of *encouragement*. That merchant had to part with his goodly pearls for the sake of the one all-precious one. You not only will not have to do this, but they will become more goodly and more indisputably yours than ever if the all-precious one be yours. You will have to renounce none of them, nothing lovely and of good report, nothing wherein there is any virtue or any praise. On the contrary, they shall gain an added lustre from their association with that chief excellence which we would have you win. Like as there is so great difference between a fair landscape on a bright summer's morn, and that same scene looked upon amid the mists of winter, so shall all that is virtuous and good in us attain to a higher beauty, a more perfect loveliness, by the bright shining of the Sun of righteousness upon them. Apart from him they are cold, dim, vague, uncertain; but in him and through him they become radiant and more beautiful than ever. And not only so, but they are more securely yours; they are far less likely to be lost. 2. *By way of warning*, let me remind you that on the wedding garment in which we must all be clothed if we would enter in and share in the festivities of the marriage supper of the Lamb—on that garment there shines resplendent but *one* jewel; it is this pearl of great price. If we have not that, no bedizening of ourselves with such goodly pearls as we may possess, or think we possess, will serve instead. Many will seek, do seek, so to adorn themselves. But all such righteousness is rejected, all such trust refused. Oh, then, to your virtues and other lovely and lovable qualities add this—trust in the blessed Saviour's Name, which will include in it the heart perfectly surrendered, the will yielded up to him!—C.

Vers. 1, 2.—*A usurper in the inheritance.* I. ACTUAL POSSESSION IS NOT THE ONLY THING TO BE CONSIDERED. Ammon is the actual present possessor of the territory of Gad. But every possessor must be ready upon occasion to show his title. With respect to the most trifling article the possessor must be able to make clear that it is his own, that he bought it, or inherited it, or had it given to him; in short, that it came to him in some entirely lawful way. Ammon had taken Gad by force, probably a very easy thing to do in the depressed condition of Israel's fortunes. And if it be said in reply that Israel had originally taken this very territory of Gad by force, such a statement is, of course, quite correct. But then we have to keep in mind the typical character of Israel. Everything depends on the point of view from which we look. Certain rules of legal ownership are an indispensable necessity of present social order, but at intervals in the course of the world revolutions come more or less extensive, and existing legal

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ownerships get utterly swept away. The Maker of the world, who is also the Bringer-forth of the abundance of the soil, is to be looked to as the real Disposer of what he has made. And therefore, with respect to every actual possession of man, we have the question to ask—Is it as the possession of Ammon, or as the possession of Israel? And chiefly we should ask the question with respect to ourselves. Whatever it be, external goods, or office, or reputation, have we got it, proceeding on the very highest principles of action, those which God himself would have us to employ?

II. ABIDING POSSESSION, AND HOW IT IS TO BE GAINED. Ammon now holds Gad, as it seems, very firmly. What can Israel now do to get the territory back? That question Jehovah will answer in his own time, and Ammon will have to suffer for violently laying hold of what was not its own. And yet, bear in mind that this very action came through Ammon's alienation from the true Lord and Guide of men. That alienation may manifest itself in different ways, but all sin and all chastisement of sin are traceable back to the alienation. Ammon was really trying to gratify a right desire in a wrong way. The desire for possession and for increase of possession, continuous and ever-expanding, is a right desire. But it must be a possession assimilated to all that is best, all that is most enduring in our nature. Legal ownership is often in inverse proportion to actual enjoyment. The spiritual Israelite, the genuine, devout, habitual believer in Jesus Christ, is to be heir of all things. The things unseen and eternal are his, and they are his because a correspondence has been divinely produced between him and them (1 Cor. vi. 9—11; xv. 53). Inheritances gained after the natural fashion very soon turn out delusive.—Y.

Ver. 16.—*The pride of apparent security.* I. THE REAL EXTENT OF THE SECURITY. Not without some cause did Edom pride itself on its position. Security is a relative word. Mountain fastnesses are a sufficient defence against such attacks as Edom can measure and understand. Mountain fastnesses have done much for the cause of national liberty and independence. They ought not to be the shelter and home of brigands; but it is right to notice their glorious place in history as the shelter and home of struggling freemen. God would not have us undervalue any security so far as it is a real security. The mistake is when we live as if *all* precious things could be preserved by securities which Providence has only given for the preservation of certain outward things. So far from our overvaluing securities coming from our own strength and external resources, it may truly be said that we rather undervalue them. If we could only use them in the right way, with insight and without prejudice, we should find many dangers of the present life greatly diminished.

II. THE WAY IN WHICH A SECURITY MAY BECOME A PERIL. Edom lives as it likes among its great natural strongholds. Long experience has taught it exactly how to deal with every attacking force, and it sees no danger with which it cannot effectually deal. Thus the dangers and deliverances which come out of the unseen alike escape attention. Men are protected outwardly; they have all that heart can wish; but meanwhile the heart is left exposed to every temptation. The fewer dangers there are outwardly, the more dangers there are inwardly; and the more dangers there are outwardly, the fewer there may be inwardly. For when men live amid dangers and inconveniences to the outward life, then their eyes are open to the comparative superficiality of such dangers. They see how the deepest treasures of life, the most abiding ones, may remain perfectly safe while outward things are going to pieces. Better would it have been for Edom to live in the exposed plain, if thereby it had been brought to trust and know that God who is the only true Refuge.

III. THE FALLACY OF SEEKING SECURITY IN A HIGHER DEGREE OF THE ESSENTIALLY INSECURE. The eagle dwells in inaccessible heights, and thus it may be reckoned a symbol of the greatest security attainable here below. But after all, the word "inaccessible" is only a synonym for what is exceedingly difficult of attainment. Courage, patience, and perseverance may do much to blot out the word "inaccessible." And if this be so from the human point of view, how much plainer is it that all human securities, however high the degree they attain in our estimate, are in the sight of God as nothing! The great thing that sends us wrong in trying to make life really secure is that, instead of fixing our thoughts on an entirely different *kind* of danger, we allow ourselves to act as if the only thing needful was to guard against a higher degree of the danger already

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perceived. To God dealing with the ungodly and the unrighteous, mountain and plain are alike.—Y.

Ver. 23.—*The perils of the sea.* I. THE FEELING PRODUCED BY MARITIME DANGER. Sorrow is far too vague a word for the feeling here referred to. Fear, anxiety, constant watchfulness against close and sudden and increasing danger, a sense that utter destruction may come at any moment,—these are the feelings going to make up the complex state of mind with which Damascus is so profoundly disturbed. No discomposing effect produced by a land danger was enough to serve the prophet's purpose. Not but what land perils taken in the sum of them are greater than sea ones; but they do not produce the same effect on the mind. Away out at sea one is so completely at the mercy of the waters. There is no chance to say, "Run for your life." There is nothing left for it but patience, submission, and hope trying to rise above opposed emotions. Those who have been in such circumstances will be best able to realize the force and peculiarity of the figure here employed. The Old Testament furnishes one illustration in Jonah's disobedient voyage, and the New Testament another in the experiences connected with the shipwreck of Paul.

II. THE WAY TO PREPARE FOR SUCH AN HOUR. The hour in which human strength and wisdom can do nothing may come on us unawares, may come fated with terrible appearances beyond all previous imaginations, but it by no means follows that such an hour is to come unprepared for. More preparation is needed than simply that of counting on the chances of escaping such an hour altogether. The hour may be escaped, but all who go down to the sea in ships cannot escape it; and therefore they do wisely to prepare for it, especially as the preparation arises from a state of mind which brings the greatest positive blessings. The peace that passeth all understanding is a peace that comprehends and subdues every possible disturbing cause. The attainment of this peace and the benefits consequent upon it have been wonderfully proved in terrible cases of shipwreck. The true wisdom for us all in this world so full of perils, whether we have to face the dangers of sea or of land, is to have the real treasures of life in heaven. Then when we have done all that human resources can compass, we are sure that the most precious things remain safe beyond the reach of harm.—Y.

Vers. 34—39.—*The fate of Elam.* I. THE ELEMENTS OF DOOM. 1. *Loss of active strength.* The breaking of the bow ought, perhaps, to be taken somewhat literally. Elam may have been a people where skill in archery reckoned for much of its strength. Whatever our peculiar natural strength may be, God can break it to pieces. We should never pride ourselves on what is peculiar to us, for the really best things are those which may become common to all men. 2. *The loss of all union.* The two ways in which nations perish. (1) They retain their corporate existence, remain in their country, but lose their independence and enter into servitude. (2) They are scattered, and lose all the outward signs of a nation. Thus in this scattering we have a symbol of the way in which men who have been joined together for evil purposes may be disunited. Union itself is strength so long as it lasts, even if no actual step be taken. God can destroy the schemes of men and at the same time throw them into new relations as individuals, so that they may be forced each one into a new scheme and plan for himself. When God scatters and humbles nations, there is pain to the individual for the time in his feeling of nationality, but for all that the scattering is a good thing for the individual and for the world. 3. *The destruction of the ruling men in Elam.* God will set up his throne. The visible power and glory of those who represented Elam is to pass away. In a monarchy the king and his nobles give a centre, around which the whole nation gathers. When this centre is taken away there is nothing to act as a sufficient point of union for the scattered ones if they are so disposed. What God does he does completely.

II. NOTE THAT THE REASON OF ALL THIS IS NOWHERE DISTINCTLY EXPRESSED IN THE PROPHECY. And yet we know there is nothing capricious and arbitrary in all this severity. Elam must have done much wickedness in the sight of Jehovah. Wherever there is suffering there is sin; and, more than that, when God indicates his own special interference we know that he has a sufficient reason for it in the wrong-doing of those with whom he thus deals.

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III. THE ELEMENT OF HOPE. The captivity of Elam, as it is called, is not to endure for ever. A brighter future is coming, spoken of very indefinitely, but not therefore uncertainly. Not, of course, that Elam was to be re-established literally in its old possessions and glory. Such verses as this must be taken spiritually. It is God's way of setting before us the truth that, whatever may be lost by a particular community or a particular generation, only vanishes to reappear in a far greater gain to every individual, spiritually considered.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTERS L. AND LI.

ON BABYLON.

CHAPTER L.

We have now reached a point at which some reference is necessary to the controversies of the so-called "higher criticism." An attempt must be made to put the reader in possession of the data which are so variously estimated by critics of different schools. Theological considerations need not, and therefore ought not, to be admitted; like every other critical question, that which we are now approaching can be argued out on purely literary grounds. At first sight, indeed, it would appear not to require a long debate, seeing that in ch. l. 1 and li. 60 the prophecy is expressly attributed to Jeremiah. But, on the other hand, it must be observed that the authorship of the heading in ch. l. 1 is altogether obscure; very possibly, like those of so many of the psalms, the heading may be incorrect. And as to ch. li. 60, can we be absolutely certain that the expression, "all these words," was intended to refer to the prophecy which now precedes ch. li. 59—64? No doubt Jeremiah did write a prophecy against Babylon, and give it to Seraiah with the charge described in ch. li. 61—64. But how do we know that this prophecy has come down to us in the form in which it was written?

This attitude of reserve is not assumed without substantial grounds, derived from two sources—the epilogue (ch. li. 59—64) and the prophecy itself. First, as to the epilogue. It is clear that the words, "and they shall be weary," are out of place in ver. 64, and that they are wrongly repeated from ver. 58. But how came they to be repeated? Because, originally, the declaration, "Thus far are the words of Jeremiah," stood at the end of ver. 58. When the short narrative in vers. 59—64 (ending at "I will bring upon her") was combined with ch. l. 1—li. 58, the declaration in question was removed from ver. 58 to ver. 64, and, by accident, the preceding word (in the Hebrew) was removed with it. This leaves it open to us to doubt whether the present prophecy on Babylon is really the one referred to in ver. 60, supposing, that is, there are other reasons, derived from the prophecy itself, for questioning its Jeremianic authorship.

The reasons which have been adduced for doing so are analogous to those which lead so many students to doubt the Isaianic authorship of Isa. xl.—xlvi.[1]

1. The author of the latter prophecy (or the greater part thereof) writes as if he were living at the close of the Babylonian exile. So does the author of ch. l. and li. "Yet a little while," he says (ch. li. 33), "and the time of her harvest shall come"—the time, that is, of that judicial interposition which (comp. Isa. xvii. 5, 11; Matt. xiii. 39) is the heavenly antitype of harvest. He urges his fellow-countrymen to flee, while there is still time, from the doomed city (ch. li. 6, 45). He mentions, as the instruments of the Divine vengeance, the Medes (ch. li. 11, 28), and, as it would seem, refers, though obscurely, to Cyrus (ch. li. 20—23).

2. Although the above statement is literally true of most of Isa. xl.—lxvi., yet there are some passages which are much more suggestive of a Palestinian origin than of a Babylonian (see Cheyne's 'Prophecies of Isaiah,' ii. 202). Precisely so in ch. l. and li., at least according to one

[1] 'Encyclopædia Britannica,' ninth edition, article "Jeremiah."

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prevalent interpretation of ch. l. 5; li. 50 (which are thought to imply a residence in Jerusalem); l. 28; li. 11, 35, 51 (suggestive, perhaps, of the continuance of Jerusalem and the temple); l. 17; li. 34 (implying, as some think, that Nebuchadnezzar was still alive). Still, there is so much doubt respecting the soundness of the inferences, that it is hardly safe to rely too confidently upon them. The case of ch. l. and li. is, therefore, in so far rather less favourable to Jeremiah's authorship than that of Isa. xl.—lxvi. is to that of Isaiah.

3. Amongst much that is new and strange in the style of phraseology of Isa. xl.—lxvi., there is not a little that reminds one forcibly of the old Isaiah. Similarly with ch. l. and li., as compared with Jeremiah, "Every impartial judge," says Kuenen (who will not be suspected of a prejudice for tradition), "must admit that the number of parallel passages is very large, and that the author of ch. l. and li. agrees with no one more than with Jeremiah." For instance, the formula, "Thus saith Jehovah Sabáoth, the God of Israel" (ch. l. 18; li. 33), also occurs in ch. vii. 3; ix. 15, and some twenty-six other passages; comp. also ch. l. 3 with ix. 9; l. 5 with xxxii. 40; l. 7 with ii. 3, xiv. 18, xvii. 13; and see other passages referred to in the Exposition.

The probability would, therefore, appear to be that, whatever solution we adopt for the literary problems of Isa. xl.—lxvi., an analogous solution must be adopted for ch. l. and li. The whole question is so large, and connects itself with so many other problems, that the present writer declines to pronounce upon it here. Only it should be observed (1) that both subject and tone remind us of Isa. xl.—lxvi. and the kindred prophecies scattered about in the first part of the Book of Isaiah, and more especially of Isa. xiii. and the closely related prophecy, Isa. xxxiv.; (2) that these two chapters, ch. l. and li., present some striking points of contact with Ezekiel, who, though contemporary with Jeremiah, was still a *later* contemporary, and allusions to whom (since Ezekiel was a literary rather than an oratorical prophet) imply that his prophetic book was already in circulation—in other words, suggest a date well on in the Exile for the prophet who alludes to him; (3) that, though there are many Jeremianic allusions in ch. l. and li., there are also several passages copied almost verbally from prophecies of Jeremiah, and applied to Babylon and its assailants (it seems difficult to believe that Jeremiah should have been such a good economizer of his literary work). It deserves to be added (4) that, though Jeremiah is a great student of the earlier prophetic writings, and makes numerous allusions to them (see especially ch. xlvi.—xlix.), nothing approaching to the mosaic-work in ch. l. and li. can be pointed to in the undoubted prophecies of Jeremiah. In fact, the Exposition will show that the author of these two chapters has borrowed almost the whole of their contents from other prophets—his own property, so to speak, being too insignificant to be worth mentioning.

Here, in justification of (1), is a list of points of contact between ch. l. and li. and Isa. xiii.:—

(*a*) "To consecrate [or, 'sanctify']," used of persons, ch. li. 27; Isa. xiii. 3. *Here only* (elsewhere with "war" following).

(*b*) "Lift ye up a banner," ch. l. 2; li. 27; also Isa. xiii. 2.

(*c*) Comp. ch. l. 16 with Isa. xiii. 14; close phraseological agreement.

(*d*) Comp. ch. l. 6, 17 with first part of Isa. xiii. 14; agreement as to sense.

(*e*) "Behold, I will stir up against Babylon," ch. li. 1 (comp. l. 9); so Isa. xiii. 17. Comp. also, however, Isa. xli. 25; Joel iii. (Hebrew, iv.) 7—9.

(*f*) Comp. ch. li. 3 (ch. l. 14, 29) with Isa. xiii. 18; agreement as to sense.

(*g*) Comp. ch. li. 11, 28 with Isa. xiii. 17 (mention of the Medes).

(*h*) Comp. ch. l. 39, 40 with Isa. xiii. 19—22.

This last parallel may, perhaps, be questioned. At first sight it may appear that both ch. l. 40 and Isa. xiii. 19 are based upon ch. xlix. 18 (which see), but when we inspect Isa. xiii. 19 *b* more closely in the Hebrew, we shall find reason to conclude that the original, both of this passage and of ch. l. 40, is Amos iv. 11. We must, therefore, put ch. xlix. 18 out of the question, and learn to be on our guard against plausible inferences. The only point which remains to be decided is the relation between ch. l.

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40 and Isa. xiii. 19; which passage is the original? One important element in our decision will be the naturalness in the mode of reference to Sodom and Gomorrah; to the present writer this seems to determine the question against ch. l. and li. and in favour of Isa. xiii. (The imitation is limited to Isa. xiii. because Isa. xiv. passes on to another though a related subject.)

And here, in justification of (2), are points of contact between ch. l. and li. and the Prophet Ezekiel.

(*a*) *Ideas and "motives."* (*α*) Figure of scattered flock, ch. l. 6, 7 (Ezek. xxxiv.). (*β*) Effects of the avenging Sword of Jehovah, ch. l. 35—38 (Ezek. xxi. 30; xxxiii. 1—6).

(*b*) *Words and phrases.* (*α*) No word is more distinctly peculiar to Ezekiel than *gillūlim*, idol-blocks, which occurs no less than thirty-nine times in his book, and elsewhere only once in Leviticus, once in Deuteronomy, six times in Kings, and once in Jeremiah (l. 2). (*β*) *'Ānaq*, to groan, occurs thrice in Ezekiel, once in Jeremiah (li. 52), and nowhere else. It is remarkable that in the latter passage we find not only a word but a phrase of Ezekiel's (see Ezek. xxvi. 13). (*γ*) Pekod, the name of a Chaldean district, occurs in ch. l. 21; also Ezek. xxiii. 23. (*δ*) The striking combination, *pakhōth ūsĕghānim*, occurs in ch. li. 28, 57; also Ezek. xxiii. 6, 12, 23. (*ε*) *Kasdim* for "Chaldea" (properly the Chaldeans), ch. l. 10; li. 24, 35; also Ezek. xvi. 29; xxiii. 16. (*ζ*) Ch. li. 25, 26 seems to allude to Ezek. xxxv. 3—5, 9 (see the Hebrew, and verify the statement by the Hebrew concordance).

(*c*) *General characteristics of style.* Granting that the style of ch. l. and li. approaches nearest on the whole to that of Jeremiah, it must be admitted, in the words of the latest German critic, Budde, that it "frequently enough declines from the simple, plain, and rather loose style of Jeremiah, to the flowery and turgid manner of speech of Ezekiel;" also that the points of contact are such as imply the originality of Ezekiel and the dependence upon him of ch. l. and li.

Ver. 1.—Against; rather, *concerning*.

Vers. 2—10.—Babylon's fall and Israel's deliverance.

Vers. 2, 3.—The prophet, with the eye of faith, sees his revelation accomplished. Babylon (like Moab) *is* taken; her idols *are* destroyed. In his exuberant joy, he calls on the bystanders to proclaim the good news to the sympathetic nations, and to **set up** (or rather, *lift up*) **a standard** (as ch. iv. 6), to call the attention of those who might not be within hearing of the proclamation. The idols have been convicted of false pretensions; they are *ashamed* and *dismayed* (so we should render rather than **confounded** and **broken in pieces**) at the terrible result to their worshippers. **Bel** and **Merodach** are not different deities, but merely different names of one of the two principal gods of the later Babylonian empire. Bel, it is true, was originally distinct from Merodach, but ultimately identified with him. Merodach was the tutelary god of Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar seems to have been specially adicted to his worship, though, indeed, he mentions Nebo also with hardly less honour. This is the beginning of an inscription of this king's, preserved at the India House:—"Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, glorious prince, worshipper of Marduk, adorer of the lofty one, glorifier of Nabu, the exalted, the possessor of intelligence" (Mr. Rodwell's translation, 'Records of the Past,' v. 113). Elsewhere Nebuchadnezzar speaks of Marduk as "the god my maker," "the chief of the gods," and of himself as "his (Marduk's) eldest son, the chosen of his heart." **Her images.** It is a very pecular word (*gillūlim*), specially frequent in Ezekiel, and also found in a chapter of Leviticus with which Ezekiel has affinities (Lev. xxvi. 30). It evidently involves a sore disparagement of idol-worship. The etymological meaning is "things rolled," which may be variously interpreted as "idol-blocks" (Gesenius), or "doll-images" (Ewald).

Ver. 3.—**Out of the north.** There was a peculiar mystery attaching to the north in the Hebrew mind, as, in fact, the word very for "north" in Hebrew (literally, *the hidden*) indicates. The burnt offering was to be sacrificed on the north side of the altar (Lev. i. 11), and the four cherubim, in the vision of Ezekiel, are described as coming from the north (Ezek. i. 4). The horror with which Babylon was regarded was intensified, apparently, by its northern position (ch. i. 14), and now the "hidden" north again pours forth its swarms of warriors against Babylon herself. **They shall remove, they shall depart**; rather, *they are fled, they are gone*; almost the same clause occurs in ch. ix. 10. The prediction is realized as past.

Ver. 4.—**In those days,** etc. The destruction of Babylon is immediately followed by the deliverance of Israel. But the description of the latter is a remarkable one. We are by no means to regard it as an idealized

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picture of the return of the Jews under Zerubbabel, any more than we can suppose the glowing promises in the second part of Isaiah to have their sole fulfilment in that disappointing event. No; it is the characteristic of Messianic prophecy that, with "foreshortened perspective," the prophets represent as equally near events which are really separated by ages. In the Book of Isaiah, for instance, preliminary judgments are repeatedly described in terms which, properly speaking, only apply to the great final judgment. In fact, each great political revolution is a stage in the Divine drama of judgment, which will reach its close in the final cataclysm. And so too here (as well as in Isa. xl.—lxvi.) the promise of mercy to Israel, which began to be fulfilled in the edict of Cyrus, is represented as if the still future conversion of the people of Israel were actually accomplished. The description reminds us of ch. iii. 18—21. Notice the penitence of the returning exiles, and the reunion of Israel and Judah (see on ch. iii. 18). **Going and weeping; they shall go**; rather, *they shall go, weeping as they go.*

Ver. 5.—**Thitherward**; rather, *hitherward.* The prophet is evidently writing from Jerusalem (comp. ch. li. 50). **Let us join ourselves.** A conjectural emendation (*nilveh* for *nilvū*, a difficult reading, meaning, perhaps, "join yourselves"). **A perpetual covenant.** The same phrase occurs in ch. xxxii. 40. The addition, "that shall not be forgotten," reminds us of "the ark of the covenant," which was "not to be remembered" (ch. iii. 16).

Ver. 6.—**Lost sheep.** Not merely with reference to the scattering of the Captivity (as in Isa. xxvii. 13, where the Authorized Version has "ready to perish"), but to the transgressions of the Law of God, of which the Jews had been constantly guilty (comp. Ps. cxix. 176; Isa. liii. 6). **Their shepherds . . . mountains.** This is the marginal correction in the Hebrew Bible; the text has, "Their shepherds have caused them to go astray upon the seducing mountains"—a strange expression, which is, however, defended by Naegelsbach on the ground of ch. ii. 20; iii, 2, 23; xvii. 2. **Their resting-place**; literally, *their couching-place*; i.e. their pasture, Jehovah, at once their Pasture (ver. 7) and their true Shepherd (Ps. xxiii. 1).

Ver. 7.—**We offend not**; rather, *we incur no guilt.* As long as Israel lived a life consecrated to Jehovah, "all that devoured him incurred guilt" (ch. ii. 3). But now that he had wandered from Jehovah, and so forfeited his protection, his adversaries denied that they could be brought to account. **Habitation of justice**; strictly, *pasture of righteousness.* The same title is applied in ch. xxxi. 23 to Jerusalem. But Jerusalem's spiritual efficacy is only derivative; rest and life flow from Jehovah alone, who is, therefore, the true Pasture of his people. In the Hebrew, "Jehovah" is placed emphatically at the end of the verse. **The hope of their fathers** (comp. Ps. xxii. 4). To forsake Jehovah was an act of treason to the former generations.

Ver. 8.—The prophet returns to the fate of Babylon. He exhorts the captive Israelites to flee in time, before the hostile army reaches the city (comp. Isa. xlviii. 20). **Be as the he-goats before the flocks**; rather, *as the rams*, whose example is followed unhesitatingly by the flock. The "flocks" in this case are the strangers in Babylon (ver. 16).

Ver. 9.—**I will raise**; literally, *I will stir up* (or, *awaken*); comp. ch. vi. 22; Isa. xiii. 17. **An assembly of great nations.** So in a parallel prophecy, "the kingdoms of nations gathered together" (Isa. xiii. 4). Callias in Ebers' learned story, 'The Egyptian Princess,' speaks of "an empire so casually heaped together, and consisting of seventy populations of different tongues and customs, as that of Persia." **From thence**; *i.e.* from the head-quarters of the array of nations. **As of a mighty expert man**; rather, *as of an expert warrior* (or, *mighty man*). The marginal rendering of the Authorized Version represents a various reading of the Hebrew found in three old editions, and presupposed in the Targum and Vulgate, "one making childless," *i.e.* "a destroyer." The received reading, however, is self-evidently right. **None shall return in vain.** It seems doubtful whether this refers to the arrow or to the mighty man. The arrow may be said to "return [or, turn'] in vain" when it misses its aim or strikes the mark without piercing it (comp. 2 Sam. i. 22, where, however, it is the sword which is thus spoken of); the mighty man when he retires from the field defeated. This wider use of the phrase is sanctioned by Isa. lv. 11.

Vers. 11—20.—Babylon's desolation and Israel's glorification.

Vers. 11, 12.—**Because ye were glad**, etc.; rather, *Truly ye may be glad; truly ye may rejoice, ye spoilers of mine heritage; truly ye may leap as a heifer at grass, and neigh as steeds; yet your mother*, etc. Your triumph shall be of short duration; disgrace follows closely upon its heels. "Your mother" is a term for the nation regarded as a whole (comp. Isa. l. 1; Hos. ii. 2; iv. 5). "At grass" is the reading adopted by the Septuagint and Vulgate; the pointed text has (the vowels alone are different), "(a heifer) that threshеth," *i.e.* allowed to eat its fill of corn, agreeably to the direction in Deut. xxv. 4,

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It is not clear why the Authorized Version deserted the received pointing. **Behold, the hindermost of the nations** shall be a **wilderness**; rather, *Behold, the hindermost of the nations! a wilderness*, etc. The subject understood in the first part is obviously the people, in the second the land, of Babylon.

Ver. 13.—All but the first clause of this verse is taken from ch. xix. 8; xlix. 17.

Ver. 14.—**Put yourselves in array**, etc. The Authorized Version, guided, perhaps, by considerations of rhythm, has misplaced the first stop, which ought to be after "bow." The Medes are referred to in a parallel prophecy as great archers (Isa. xiii. 18).

Ver. 15.—**Shout against her**; *i.e.* raise the battle-cry (comp. Josh. vi. 16; Isa. xlii. 13). **She hath given her hand.** This action is generally mentioned as a pledge of friendship or a ratification of a promise (2 Kings x. 15; Ezek. xvii. 18; Ezra x. 19); but the notion of surrender or submission would naturally follow (so in 1 Chron. xxix. 24; 2 Chron. xxx. 8). Dr. Payne Smith well quotes the words of Turnus, when begging his life of Æneas, "Vicisti, et victum tendere palmas Ausonii videre" ('Æneid,' xii. 936). **Her foundations.** The word is difficult, but a comparison with the Syriac suggests the rendering, *her walls*. "Foundations" is obviously wrong.

Ver. 16.—**Cut off the sower**, etc. "Babylon" here probably means Babylonia, for it is clear from ver. 12 that the curse belongs to the country as well as the city of Babylon; indeed, "Babylon" in ver. 13 seems to be used in the wider sense. Others think of the open spaces within the walls of Babylon, in which it is said that crops were raised to provision the city in case of a siege (see Rawlinson, 'Ancient Monarchies,' ii. 513); but this is less natural. **They shall turn**, etc. The subject is, not the husbandmen, but the strangers in Babylonia; comp. the parallel passage, Isa. xiii. 14, on which this passage is based. Æschylus ('Pers.,' 53) speaks of the πάμμικτος ὄχλος in Babylon. Whether brought by force from their homes, like the Jews, or voluntary residents for the sake of commerce, all should hurry from the doomed city.

Ver. 17.—**Israel is a scattered sheep**, etc. Here a pause in the discourse occurs. The prophet returns to the present condition of Israel, who is likened to a sheep scared away from its fold by lions. The ruin wrought by the lions is described first as "devouring" and then as "breaking the bones" of Israel—in either case it is complete destruction, but the completeness is more emphasized by the second figure. In fact, when the "ten tribes" were carried captive, the elements of the theocracy still remained in the southern kingdom.

Ver. 19.—The flock restored. **His habitation** is an unfortunate rendering, which obscures the beautiful figure; read, *his pasture* (as in ver. 7). The places mentioned were all famous for their rich pasturage (comp. ch. xxii. 6; Isa. xxxiii. 9; Micah vii. 14 (especially); Ezek. xxxiv. 13, 14; Cant. iv. 1).

Ver. 20.—**In those days**, etc. An evangelical promise, reminding us of ch. xxxi. 34 and xxxiii. 8, and of the combination of spiritual with temporal blessings in the latter part of Isaiah.

Vers. 21—28.—The punishment of Babylon, corresponding to her crimes.

Ver. 21.—**The land of Merathaim**; *i.e.* of double rebellion. Probably enough an actual geographical name may lie at the root of this singular expression; but we are not able at present to say what it was. The prophet has, at any rate, modified it in such a way as to convey a definite meaning, symbolic of the character of Babylon (comp. on ver. 31). What was this meaning? According to Gesenius, there is an allusion to the two great blows inflicted on Israel and Judah by Assyria and Babylon respectively; but as these two powers were but the instruments of a higher Hand, this explanation would seem to be inconsistent with the prophetic teaching. Dahler, De Wette, and Keil take the two rebellions to be the spiritual ones of idolatry and pride; and there is no obvious objection to this. But the dual may be simply intended to express intensity; comp. ch. xvii. 18, "Destroy them with double destruction" (see note). **The inhabitants of Pekod**; *i.e.* of punishment. But here too a geographical name very probably lies underneath. The Taylor cylinder-inscription of Sennacherib mentions a Pukudu (= Pekod), together with Havrann (Hauran) and Nabatu (Nabathæans); but this was the name of a tribe. In Ezek. xxiii. 23 we read, "The Babylonians, and all the Chaldeans, Pekod, and Shoa, and Koa," etc.; and in 'Records of the Past,' xi. 92, we find a town Pikudu mentioned, lying to the south of Babylon, which may, perhaps, have given its name to a district, and to this district the prophet not improbably alludes. M. Halévy conjectures that the event which corresponds to the prophecy is the decisive battle which virtually terminated the Babylonian empire. According to the newly discovered Cyrus-inscription, this battle was fought near a place called Rutu, which appears to have been situated in the neighbourhood of Pukudu ('Records,' *l.c.*). About the symbolic meaning there can be no doubt: Pekod is a worthy pendant to Merathaim. Sin and punishment are so closely connected in the prophetic mind that one word sometimes

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covers both notions. It is doubtful, for instance, whether the better rendering of Isa. v. 18 is "draw sin as with a cart-rope" or "draw punishment."

Ver. 23.—**The hammer of the whole earth.** So in Isaiah (xiv. 5), "Jehovah hath broken the staff of the wicked, the rod of the rulers; which smote peoples in passion with an unceasing stroke." In the next chapter a similar title is conferred upon Israel, with the right to retaliate upon Babylon all the evil which Babylon had done to Zion (ch. li. 20—24). Compare the epithet *Martel*, "The Hammer," given to Charles, Duke of the Franks, on account of his great victory over the Saracens at Tours; it is tempting to add "Makkābi," the epithet of Judas (Maccabæus), but the *k* is not the same letter as that in *maqqab*, hammer.

Ver. 24.—**I have laid a snare for thee.** It was very natural, as long as Cyrus's own account of the capture of Babylon was unknown, to refer for a fulfilment to the stratagem which, as Herodotus relates, that king employed, viz. diverting the waters of the Euphrates into an already existing reservoir, and entering the city unexpectedly by the river-channel (Herod., i. 191). But the cylinder-inscription, translated by Sir H. Rawlinson in 1880, shows that Babylon opened its gates of its own accord, on hearing the defeat and capture of Nabonidus. There is no occasion to look for any further fulfilment of the prophecy than the surprise which must ever come upon the bystander when he sees a mighty empire suddenly pass into the hands of its enemies. The tenses in this verse are not very happily rendered. It would be better to translate, *I laid a snare for thee, and thou wast taken, O Babylon, unawares; thou wast found*, etc., *because thou hadst striven against the Lord.*

Ver. 25.—**Hath opened his armoury.** A truly grand figure. The north country (the "hidden" part of the earth, as it was called in Hebrew) is regarded by the prophet as a storehouse of young and "inexhaustible" nations, from which Jehovah can at any time "bring forth weapons of his indignation." The latter phrase occurs again in the parallel prophecy (Isa. xiii. 5), where it is evidently applied to the army of Medo-Persian invaders. **For this is the work**, etc.; rather, *For the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, hath a work.*

Ver. 26.—**Come against her**; rather, *Come to her.* Dr. Payne Smith infers that Babylon has already fallen, and that the persons addressed are not warriors only, but plunderers of every kind. This is almost too subtle. The prepositions "to" and "against" (literally, *upon*) are so frequently interchanged (comp. ch. xlvi. 22; xlix. 9). **From the utmost border**; rather, *all together*; it is an idiom expressing universality. Those who are spoken of are regarded as a totality, "from the utmost end" of which its members come. **Cast her up as heaps**; rather, *Cast it up as sheaves*; i.e. ransack the repositories of Babylon's wealth, and heap it up like corn; last of all, **destroy her** (rather, *it*) **utterly.** The verb is a very emphatic one. Its primary meaning is "to cut off, or shut off." Hence *khérem*, a devoted thing, is applied in the Law to that which is "tabooed," as it were, cut off from any but sacred uses. In Lev. xxvii. 21 it is used of a field wholly appropriated to the sanctuary, and in 1 Sam. xv. 21 and 1 Kings xx. 42 to living beings doomed to destruction. Destruction is generally a part of the meaning; but it is not merely destruction, but an act of homage to the Divine justice.

Ver. 27.—In this verse we are told that the *khérem*, i.e. the Divine ban, falls upon the entire male population, as in the holy wars of Joshua (Josh. vi. 21; xi. 11, 20). **All her bullocks.** As in ch. li. 40 and Isa. xxxiv. 6, the doomed people is likened to sacrificial victims (comp. ch. xlvi. 10). The same fact is described without figure in ch. xlviii. 15. **Go down to the slaughter**; *i.e.* be forced down to the slaughtering-trough.

Ver. 28.—**The voice of them that flee**, etc.; rather, *Hark! those that flee*, etc. A confused murmur indicates the approach of the fugitives with their great tidings. **The vengeance of his temple**; *i.e.* the punishment due to Babylon for burning the temple; comp. next verse, also ver. 15, "The vengeance of the Lord," and ch. li. 11.

Vers. 29—40.—The completeness of Babylon's destruction.

Ver. 29.—**Call together the archers**, etc. A dramatic way of indicating that the siege is about to begin.

Ver. 30.—With the exception of "her" in the second clause, a repetition of ch. xlix. 26.

Ver. 31.—**O thou most proud**; rather, *O Pride!* Just as in ver. 21 Babylon is called Merathaim, and as Egypt is, in Hebrew poetry, called Rahab, *i.e.* "boisterousness" or "arrogance" (Isa. xxx. 7; li. 9; Job xxvi. 12; Ps. lxxxvii. 4; lxxxix. 10).

Ver. 32.—**The most proud**; rather, *Pride.* **Raise him up.** For the sake of uniformity, "her" would be better; for it is Babylon who is spoken of. There is an inconsistency in the use of the persons in the original. Elsewhere in this description Babylon is feminine; here it is masculine, to agree with "Pride."

Ver. 33.—At the end of ver. 32 a pause occurs in the discourse. Then the prophet

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takes up the theme again with renewed emphasis. Were oppressed; rather, *are oppressed*. Because the oppression of Israel and Judah still continues, whereas Israel has by this time been amply punished ("received double," Isa. xl. 2) for her transgressions, Jehovah will himself interpose. He is, in fact, Israel's *Goel* ("Redeemer"), i.e. charged, like the next of kin, with the duty of recovering thy rights and avenging thy wrongs (comp. Isa. xli. 14; xlvii. 4). On the *Goel*, see Lev. xxv. 25; Ruth iv. 6; Numb. xxx. 19.

Ver. 34.—**That he may give rest to the land**; rather, *to the earth*. Babylon was one of the great world-empires; we can hardly dispense with this convenient Germanism. It was the wont of the Chaldeans, as Habakkuk puts it (i. 6), "to walk through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling-places that were not theirs." Observe the striking contrast—"rest" to the world which has been too long deprived of it, and "disquiet" to those who have hitherto spread it far and wide (comp. Isa. xiv. 2, 3).

Vers. 35—38.—No human aid avails against so terrible a foe; therefore Jehovah calls upon his Sword (see on ch. xlvii. 6) to avenge the cause of his people.

Ver. 35.—**A sword is**, etc., should rather be, *Sword upon the Chaldeans;* it is an exclamation equivalent to "Let the Sword come upon the Chaldeans"—that sword which never "returns empty." **The wise men are**, partly the astronomers and astrologers at the various observatories in Babylonia, whose duty it was to send in monthly reports of the appearances in the sky, which were regarded as having an occult political significance (comp. Isa. xlvii. 13). In the next verse they are called **liars**, or *praters*. In Isa. xliv. 25 this word stands parallel to "diviners." Possibly "liars" may be a wider term than "wise men," and includes an inferior grade of pretenders to "wisdom."

Ver. 37.—**The mingled people**; rather, *the foreign peoples*. Even if in ch. xxv. 20 the Hebrew *'érebh* is an ethnographical term reminding us of the Assyrian *Urbi* used of Bedouin tribes,[1] it is clear that no such explanation will suit here (see on ch. xxv. 20).

Ver. 38.—**A drought**. The Massoretic critics, in their prosaic realism, were unable to see how a "sword" could be "upon the waters;" hence they altered *khéreb* into *khōreb*. But the sword is merely a symbol of the Divine vengeance, and may be interpreted differently according to the exigencies of the context. Render, *Sword upon the waters*. **They are mad upon** their **idols**; rather, *through Terrors they befool themselves*. "Terrors" is a synonym for the gods of the heathen, which inspired a feeling of awe rather than affection, unlike Jehovah as he revealed himself through the authors of the psalms and prophecies.

Ver. 39.—Parallel passages: Isa. xxxiv. 14; xiii. 20—22. **The wild beasts of the desert**; rather, *wild cats* (so Bochart, 'Hierozoicon,' p. 862). **Wild beasts of the islands**; rather, *jackals*. **Owls**; rather, *ostriches*.

Ver. 40.—A verbal copy of ch. xlix. 18.

Ver. 41—ch. li. 4.—The instruments of the judgment. The section is partly a cento from other prophecies. Thus vers. 41—43 are a repetition of ch. vi. 22—24, except that what is there said of Jerusalem is here applied to Babylon; and vers. 44—46 of ch. xlix. 19—21, the reference, however, being in the latter passage to Edom. In ver. 46 **At the noise of the taking of Babylon** would be more literally rendered, *At the cry, Babylon is taken*.

[1] Friedr. Delitzsch, 'Wo lag das Paradies?' (Leipz., 1881), p. 306.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 2.—*The judgment of Babylon.* The position and history of Babylon give a peculiar significance to the judgment against her.

I. BABYLON HAD BEEN THE GREATEST POWER OF HER TIME. 1. Earthly greatness is *transitory*. The supremacy of the world is an insecure position. Rivalries and hatreds inevitably spring up about it. 2. No might nor dignity can secure a people from the *judgment of Heaven*. The more talents are entrusted to a nation the heavier must its responsibility be. England will have to answer to God for her use of the vast resources on which she foolishly prides itself. The wealth and population of London are no defence against Divine judgments.

II. BABYLON HAD BEEN THE MOST VICTORIOUS KINGDOM OF HER TIME. She had conquered in her wars with neighbouring nations. While they failed she had succeeded; fortune, frowning on them, had smiled upon her. Yet Babylon's time came. No ground of confidence is more delusive than previous success. If success induces carelessness and self-indulgence, it is sure to prepare the way for future failure. The

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"fortunate man" has not the slightest reason for presuming that his good fortune will help him in the future life. If he can argue anything from it, he may conclude that, since he has had his good things in this life, the evils that fall to his share must await him in the next.

III. BABYLON HAD TRIUMPHED OVER THE PEOPLE OF GOD. Some might have thought that this was a victory of her patron god over the Jehovah of the Jews. But now "Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces." For a season the evil powers of the world may triumph over the Church of Christ. But ultimately they must succumb. Persecution cannot finally crush the truth. Unbelief, proud and insolent as it may be for a while, must ultimately bow before the power of faith. For truth is great and eternal, and God is fighting on its side.

IV. BABYLON HAD BEEN AN INSTRUMENT IN THE HANDS OF GOD. Jehovah speaks of Nebuchadnezzar as "my servant" (ch. xxvii. 6). Yet he must suffer. For he was not a deliberate, willing servant. If God overrules the action of a man for good, this result is no justification of his conduct. For he is judged by his aims and motives, and not at all by the unintentional and unforeseen results of his actions. The only service of God which renders the servant acceptable in his sight is conscious, willing, obedient service. We may be used by God for other service, and then be cast off and suffer for our sinful deeds as much as if no Divine ends had been fulfilled in them. Thus the scourge is scourged.

Vers. 4, 5.—*Returning penitents.* This picture of the restoration of Israel is interesting for the prominence given to the spiritual reformation of the people. It would be vain for them to return to their land unless they also returned to their God. The spiritual recovery that thus forms the centre of the Messianic restoration is typical of the recovery of God's wandering children as returning penitents. Consider the leading points of it.

I. REPENTANCE FOR THE PAST. The two elements of repentance are here indicated. 1. *Sorrow for sin.* The children of Israel are depicted as "weeping as they go." A due sense of sin will produce sorrow. The penitent will feel himself a "miserable sinner." But to be genuine the sorrow of penitence must rise directly out of the conviction of sin. If it were induced by sympathy, by sensational influences, etc., it would be a vain and useless thing. Moreover, grief arising out of the fear of the painful consequences of sin is not the grief of repentance. This must be a sorrow of conscience directly produced by regret for the sin itself. 2. *Change of conduct.* The penitents are to "come" and "go," etc. The prodigal arises and goes to his father. Mere idle tears are not repentance. Real repentance is the turning round of the soul from darkness to light, the active desire to amend one's ways. It is true that repentance is not regeneration. It is not a renewal of nature nor is it the realization of a better life. But it is the first step towards this, and it must grow out of an honest desire to attain it.

II. AWAKENED RELIGIOUS DEVOTION IN THE PRESENT. 1. *Inquiry.* They "seek the Lord;" they "ask the way." The penitent becomes the seeker after light. Truth, which was once a matter of indifference, or a subject of abstract questions, is now felt to be of great practical importance. 2. *A return to God.* The sinner had feared the visitation of God, but the penitent now voluntarily seeks to enter his presence. There is awakened a desire to be reconciled to God and to enjoy close communion with him. 3. *A revival of interest in public worship.* The penitents are described with their faces turned Zionward. Love to God induces interest in the worship at his house, no doubt a far less important thing than the spiritual return to God, yet noteworthy as an evidence of this. One of the leading signs of a change of heart is a renewed interest in the ordinances of religion. 4. *Brotherly companionship.* The children of Israel and the children of Judah come together. The tears of repentance melt away the old barriers of jealousy and contention. When on our knees before God we are all brethren. The forgiveness of our sin by God is conditional on our mutual forgiveness of one another (Matt. vi. 14, 15). Through union with the common Saviour all the redeemed become one family.

III. A NEW COVENANT FOR THE FUTURE. Repentance is but a beginning. The wicket-gate is entered; now the pilgrimage must be followed. The soldier is enlisted;

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the warfare lies before him. The Christian must live in the future, not wasting his remaining days in idle grief for the misspent past, but "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those which are before." It is dangerous to depend upon the new-born fervour of the hour of penitence. We need a solid conviction, a firm resolution, a covenant. He who becomes a Christian enters a covenant. He receives blessings from Christ, but he binds himself to the service of Christ. In the course of years he may be tempted to forget it. He therefore needs constant prayer and watchfulness. God will not be satisfied with the fact that some one "great transaction" is "done." The transaction is the forming of a perpetual covenant. It brings the obligation of lifelong fidelity—faithfulness "unto death."

Ver. 6.—*Lost sheep.* I. MEN ARE LIKE GOD'S SHEEP. In the Old Testament the Jews appear as the only flock, but Christ teaches us that all mankind is so regarded by God. 1. We are like *sheep*, because (1) we are *foolish* and prone to err; (2) we are *weak and defenceless;* and yet (3) of some *value* in the sight of God. 2. We are like *God's* sheep, because (1) we are not our own masters, we belong to God; (2) he watches over us, guides, feeds, protects, and blesses us.

II. SIN IS LIKE THE STRAYING OF LOST SHEEP. 1. It is straying from *God.* The shepherd goes first; the way he chooses may be narrow, steep, rugged; it may seem to lead to pastureless deserts or to dangerous forests; but it is the duty of the flock simply to follow the shepherd wherever he goes. It is our one duty to follow God in Christ. To sin is to follow the devices and desires of our own heart instead of following his will. 2. It is straying from our own *vocation.* There is a path for the sheep. There is a path for every man—a way of life into which he is called to walk. When he knows this, if he turn from his duty to any other way, no matter how pleasant and profitable it may be, he is failing in his mission, wandering from the right way.

III. MEN ARE LED ASTRAY BY BAD SHEPHERDS. It is terrible to think of the fatal work of men of great talents who have spent them in deluding or debasing their fellows. What vast harm has been done by the evil genius of great men! Intellectual leaders, philosophers, religious teachers, poets, directly turn men astray when their teaching is false and corrupt. Political leaders bring nations into great criminal wars. Court influence is potent for evil when the court is corrupt. Nevertheless men cannot throw off their own guilt upon their leaders. For they act with their free-will.

IV. THE RESULT OF STRAYING IS HOMELESS WANDERING. 1. It is to be *homeless.* The sheep are lost on the mountains. God is the Home of his sheep. To be far from God is to be on the wild mountains, open to the tempest, at the mercy of the fiercest foes. 2. It is to be *restless.* The sheep "have forgotten their resting-place." The fascination of liberty to roam over the mountains tempts the sheep to wander from their shepherd. They soon find that this very liberty becomes a curse, and the wandering a doom of wretchedness. What the soul wants is *rest,* and it can find no rest but in God.

V. CHRIST RECOVERS THE WANDERING SHEEP. The sheep could not find their way back to the fold, neither could men find their way back to God. Christ came to *seek* as well as to save. As the good Shepherd, he gave his life for the sheep. They who have wandered furthest are not beyond recovery by Christ. If but one sheep be still straying, he will not be satisfied till that one is brought back. If, then, we have wandered, our safety will be found in hearkening to the voice of the good Shepherd and following him back to our home in God.

Ver. 20.—*Perfect forgiveness.* I. IN WHAT IT CONSISTS. When God forgives a man he pardons him completely, as Christ thoroughly cured all the sick persons whom he healed in any way. There is no middle course here. Either the forgiveness is total or it is not accorded at all. 1. This is *more than the remission of penalties.* Some consequences of sin must still remain, though these are no longer indications of God's anger, but converted into merciful chastisements. But the essence of forgiveness lies deeper than any manipulation of external experience. It is inward, in the relation of God to the soul. 2. This spiritual forgiveness consists in the *removal of all estrangement* between God and the sinner. It is perfect reconciliation with no shadow cast upon it by old offences. Many men profess to forgive and yet bear a grudge, or say they

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will forgive but cannot forget, or forgive partially but retain a certain suspicion and coolness. God's forgiveness goes further. He is said to remove our sin from us "as far as the east is from the west," to "cast it into the sea," to "remember it no more." He treats his guilty but penitent child as if the sin had never been committed. No record of guilt is preserved, none can be found, even if an enemy search for it. The prodigal is not made a hired servant; he is welcomed with joy. The Christian is not grudgingly received into the outer courts of God's house; he is called to the presence of his Father and blessed with full privileges of sonship. If he is justified he is also glorified. Hence we may learn (1) that, after genuine repentance and faith, a man need not remain in a state of fear and sadness; he may rejoice with confidence. His sin is not to be found; then he need think no more of it. If God has forgotten it he also may forget it. The typical Christian is not a weeping Magdalene, but a happy, hopeful servant of Christ. We may also learn (2) to extend more charity and confidence to other men in their penitence. If God has forgiven them, who are we that we should treat them with contempt or anger?

II. How it is obtained. 1. Often *after chastisement.* The promise to Judah and Israel is forgiveness after the sufferings of the Captivity. This is not invariably the case; for (1) chastisement may fail in its work upon the soul, and then the forgiveness will not follow; or (2) God may bring the sinner to penitence by milder means. But it is the design of chastisement to lead us to the blessedness of reconciliation. 2. *After repentance.* The people are first depicted as "going, weeping as they go." Forgiveness is offered to the worst man who repents, but not to the mildest offender who remains impenitent. 3. *Through the mercy of God.* This forgiveness is part of the blessedness of the restoration which God promises to effect for his children. It is not earned by future good conduct nor by any sacrifice or penance. We now know that it is not cheap. The price is no less than the life of the Son of God. But to us it is a free gift of God's love.

Ver. 34.—*The strong Redeemer.* I. The character and power of the Redeemer. 1. *God is the Redeemer.* He is the *Goêl*, the Friend, Advocate, Avenger, and Saviour of his children. (1) The *goêl* was the next of kin (Lev. xxv. 25). No man is so nearly related to us as God is. (2) The *goêl* was bound by law to redeem or avenge the sufferer. Human laws, in so far as they are just and good, are shadows of the Divine laws, *i.e.* of the ways of God's procedure. If the Jewish law of redemption was inspired by God, it was made after the pattern of God's manner of acting. In the New Testament we see this side of God's work brought into leading prominence. Jesus Christ is the manifestation of God in the flesh, and Jesus Christ is pre-eminently "the Redeemer" (Eph. i. 7). 2. *The almightiness of God is our assurance of redemption.* The massive strength of the rock makes it painful for us to fall upon it, and fearful and fatal for it to fall upon us; but this very characteristic renders it a blessing if we rest under its shadow, build on its foundation, or cling to it for support in the driving tempest. Men may well shrink from the might of God when they are opposed to it, and tremble and despair when it rises up, awful and irresistible, to crush them; but if they can turn to it with trust and know it is working their good, they will find in it a ground for solid assurance. How disastrous would it be for us to have a weak God, though he might have all other Divine perfections! His love might be infinite; but if he could only pity, and not effectually save us, his grace would be of little use. But our Redeemer is the Lord of hosts. If a host encamp against us, the Lord of hosts is on our side. The strength of the Redeemer is of importance, because (1) our foes are great—earthly trouble, sin, death; (2) our evil state is disastrous—we have fallen far into sin, some of us, perhaps, into deep wretchedness, only a strong hand can pull us out of so horrible a pit; (3) our own strength is slight. We are not able to cope with the dangers that beset us. In face of the great forces of evil we are like withered leaves before the autumn blast. Hence to us weaklings amid the strange and awful powers of time and eternity, what grand comfort lies in the thought that "our Redeemer is strong"!

II. The method and fruits of his redemption. 1. *The method.* "He shall throughly plead their cause." The case is intricate, many cross issues arise. The honour of God, justice, the maintenance of respect for law, the government of the universe, the highest good of all creatures, are concerned in the sin of man and its effects,

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and they must all be considered and fairly treated before redemption is possible. But we have no weak Advocate. God has gone through the whole labour and sacrifice. He has paid the price—even the gift of his Son to die for us. 2. *The fruits.* (1) *Rest.* "That he may give rest to the land." This was the greatest blessing to people who had been harried by invasions and wearied with exile. Rest is what the world most wants in its war and confusion, its toil and its sorrow. "Peace on earth" is the gospel benediction. Rest is what the soul most needs—rest from sin, from self, from fear and doubt and wearing grief. Rest is the blessing Christ offers to those who will "come unto" him. Heaven is rest. (2) *The overthrow of foes.* Babylon, the troubler of the nations, will be disquieted. Christ, the Rock of salvation, is to his enemies "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence." In the spiritual redemption of Christians the spiritual foes are vanquished; sin and death, the last enemies, are slain. We can only have rest to our souls in proportion as our sins are conquered. So the Redeemer who brings balm for our soul's wounds brings a sword for its sins.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 2—5.—*Israel's deliverance.* This is described as twofold—the historical circumstances and the correlative spiritual experience. Apart from its verification in the case of ancient Israel, it is true to the actual process of many an individual conversion.

I. A PROVIDENTIAL EVENT. The outward circumstances of life are altered. External tyrannies are brought suddenly to an end, and the children of God are set free to serve God or not as they please. In every life there are some such occurrences. The spell of evil is broken and moral freedom rendered possible. And this is often brought about impressively, with the stamp of the supernatural upon it. Especially was it so with Israel's escape from Babylon, because of the permanent influence that event was to have on the spiritual history of mankind. 1. *It was of world-wide import.* Babylon was the central world-power, holding in iron subjection many nations. As a universal empire it is to be broken in pieces, and its sentence is not only announced, but published abroad as an evangel to the nations. 2. *Of evidently Divine authorship.* The clear prophecies; the moral recompense involved in its fall, and so wonderfully corresponding to its deserts, and the vast spiritual consequences accruing therefrom, make this indubitable. And equally, we may be sure, was the hand of God visible to those who were the subjects of the deliverance (see Ps. cxxiv.).

II. A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE. This corresponds to the external circumstances and gives them their real significance and effect. 1. *Sorrow for past offences.* "Weeping"—tears of grief and shame. The marvellous grace of God has broken their hearts. Tears, too, of joy and gratitude. 2. *Return to the true God.* Idolatry was henceforth and for ever forsaken. The sublimity and spirituality of God have taken possession of imagination and heart. Each step of the way to Palestine is a further removal from the sin which took them away. And it is not the carnal delights of the promised land which constitute its attraction. It is Zion they seek, the house of the Lord, that they may rebuild her ruins and restore her worship. This proves repentance real. 3. *Renewal of the covenant.* In this is repentance perfected. It is to be a new covenant—more spiritual, vital, and therefore eternal. The awful years of visitation have left an undying memory; but the interposition and grace of God have written his covenant upon their heart.—M.

Vers. 4, 5.—"*To Zion, with their faces thitherward.*" A picture of genuine repentance. The action and attitude suit the profession. The point of attraction is Zion, not Carmel or Bashan. Repentance is—

I. UNREAL. When the outward behaviour contradicts the profession, or the conduct exhibited is only conventional or intended to deceive. It is either: 1. *Half-hearted,* not having its root in deep conviction of sin, and unaccompanied by thorough separation from carnal interests. The looks of the heart are alternately attracted towards Zion and towards the world, whilst the feet go to and fro or stand still. Or: 2. *Hypocritical.* When there is no conviction and the behaviour is a pretence. When worldly aims are cloaked by religious profession.

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II. REAL. "Their faces thitherward." The attitude and movement correspond with the profession. Every preparation is made to go away from "Babylon," and the journey is commenced at once. Grief and heavenly longing are the grand motives. 1. *Genuine sorrow.* "Weeping" as they go. 2. *Pure aspiration.* They seek Zion. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," etc. 3. *Resolute endeavour.* The return is at once made, notwithstanding its difficulties and dangers. Only in Palestine can the perfect theocracy, the spiritual future, be realized, *i.e.* in a true Church fellowship, which they hasten to realize. 4. *Inward and eternal fidelity.* Covenant relationship is renewed. A new spiritual covenant, whose provisions are written on their hearts, is entered into. They are no longer their own, but the servants of God, "bought with a price." 5. *Perfect unanimity.* Both Israel and Judah. A guarantee this of success and thoroughness. The lesson has been learnt by all, and united Israel is "holiness to the Lord."—M.

Vers. 6, 7, 17—20.—*Israel as lost sheep.* This is a favourite theocratic title of Israel—the sheep of God's pasture. In itself an appeal to the traditional pastoral character of the nation, and to the marvellous guidance of their forefathers by Jehovah through the wilderness. He was the Shepherd of Israel. *The extent of their apostasy* is here described.

I. IT WAS COMPLETE. 1. *They had wandered.* The allurements of idolatry had led them on and on, and they had at length yielded to them. They had sought other pastures and acquired preferences for other worship. It is an evil sign when men lose taste for the simple services of a spiritual religion. God should be sought alone and for his own sake. 2. *They became alienated.* A natural consequence. Step by step they went so far that they could not find their way back. Spiritual unfaithfulness produces confusion and spiritual darkness. They forgot their own fold. 3. *They became degraded and morally odious.* They bore the sign of their spiritual fall upon them. Their history, too, was the record of their shame to the neighbouring peoples. The backslider can never erase the past. He will bear his Cain-mark to the end, and even the heathen and unbeliever will despise him. Their oppressors are so struck with the justice of their sentence that they justify themselves in even greater cruelties than were warranted. There is no corner of the world where the backslider can escape God's curse or hide his shame. Do what he may, he will not be as other men.

II. YET IT DID NOT BAFFLE THE SHEPHERDING OF GOD. 1. *To avenge.* The overdone punishment is not lost sight of; it will be duly recompensed. And the sacred character of the exiles will add to the guilt of those who used it as an excuse for their cruelties. God is the Judge of his lost ones even to the end. He commits his authority to no other. He who causes a child of God to go further astray, and delights in his degradation and ruin, will have to account terribly for this to his Father and Saviour. 2. *To bring back.* God's arm is *strong* to destroy the detaining influences, and outstretched far enough to reach his wanderers, even to the extremities of transgression and ruin. And he can detect them in every hiding-place and covert. He is the good Shepherd. No wilderness too wide, no mountain too high or rocky, for him to traverse. He will bring them back to righteousness and then to happiness and peace.—M.

Ver. 20.—*Divine forgiveness an absolute oblivion.* The attribute of completeness characterizes God's work of *destruction* (vers. 14—16); equally does it pertain to his work of *salvation* (vers. 19, 20). In both is manifested his righteousness in its elements of wrath and mercy. His forgiveness acts in perfect harmony with his severity.

I. HOW IT MANIFESTS ITSELF. 1. *Retrospectively.* Sins that are past are to be blotted out. A complete severance is to be effected between the era of apostasy and the new one upon which they are to enter. The strictest justice, the most jealous hostility, will fail to make out a valid indictment. 2. *Prospectively.* (1) In the character. It will be purified and confirmed in the righteousness of God. (2) In the conduct. There will be no more lapses or infidelities. Israel will be "a peculiar people, zealous of good works." It is for the sake of this new future that the guilty past has been cancelled; and it is the legitimate fruit of the experience of God's pardoning grace that the "reserved" ones shall give themselves "with a glad heart and free" to his service and glory.

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II. TO WHAT IT IS DUE. Not to Divine goodness in conflict with Divine righteousness, but to the *satisfaction of Divine righteousness.* 1. *In atonement.* The sacrifice of Christ was anticipated, and for its sake the national tribulation through which Israel had passed was accounted a satisfaction for guilt incurred. In itself that tribulation could never effect such an end, nor in any sense as supplementary of the sufferings of Christ, but only symbolically and representatively, such as the lamb slain on the temple altar. The sinner is identified with the Saviour. 2. *In making righteous.* "*Justice* looking at the sinner, not simply as the fit subject of punishment, but as existing in a moral condition of unrighteousness, and so its own opposite, must desire that the sinner should cease to be in that condition; should cease to be unrighteous—should become righteous; righteousness in God craving for righteousness in man, with a craving which the realization of righteousness in man alone can satisfy. So of holiness." (Macleod Campbell.)—M.

Vers. 21—23.—*The hammer broken.* Babylon was to be crushed by Persia—one hammer by another. As universal world-powers, the rise and fall of these had immense importance, and they illustrate the duties and responsibilities of power.

I. ALL POWER IS A STEWARDSHIP FROM GOD. The vast extent and influence of those empires, and the special mission divinely appointed them, cannot but impress one with a sense of special responsibility. There seems something supernatural in their very origin and continuance. And yet it is equally true that the humblest power is a responsibility. It might be said that a great deal of the influence of great nations arises unconsciously, mechanically, and as it were as the result of their own momentum; and also that the distribution of official duties divides, if it does not quite dissipate, individual responsibility. Yet each contributes his quota to the general result, and in the end each will have to account for his own influence. The nation as a whole will be judged, and in that judgment each will be apportioned his due share. How much more, therefore, may the individual be held responsible for the use of those powers belonging to his own nature and person, and which are under his own control or have been in great part created by his own cultivation. We are doubly responsible, viz. (1) *for the acquisition*, and (2) *for the use* of power.

II. IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE THE INSTRUMENT OF DIVINE JUSTICE AND YET BE GUILTY. Babylon was clearly and definitely "commanded" to perform its work of conquest and destruction. But it overdid its task through arrogance and unbelief. It was the land of "Double-defiance" (Merathaim), inasmuch as it had first illegitimately acquired its position by revolt against Assyria, and secondly it had triumphed in a cruel and unseemly manner over Israel (Naegelsbach). For this it was brought to account, and, therefore, is again named "Visitation." This self-sufficiency and unbelief rendered it guilty ("Against Jehovah hast thou striven," ver. 24), and yet the work it did, even in excess, was turned to account by God. We are responsible, not only for doing what God commands, but for doing it in the right spirit and manner. That God should overrule our evil for the good of others does not alter its character, which depends upon motives and dispositions. Especially in judging or punishing others ought we to keep watch over ourselves and examine our own hearts. National and official action will entail moral responsibility as much as personal, although, it may be, not so directly.

III. THE ABUSE OF POWER WILL BE TERRIBLY AVENGED. In the case of Babylon it involved it in complete destruction. The influence which had in part been a Divine creation rapidly degenerated into a merely human and sinful one. 1. *Because the consciousness of power tempts to greater arrogance and depravity;* and: 2. *Because all power has involved in it corresponding moral capacity.* 3. *It is the perversion and abuse of a gracious privilege.*—M.

Vers. 4, 5.—*Godly sorrow.* In these verses we have given us not a few of the characteristics of real repentance—that repentance which never needs to be repented of. Note some of these as seen in Israel and Judah.

I. THEY ACTUALLY SET OUT TO SEEK THE LORD. The time of thinking about it and talking of it was over. All indecision on the matter had ceased, and we see them arising and going on this blessed journey.

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II. TEARS. Had there not been the actual setting out, these tears might not have counted for much. But it is said they were "*going* and weeping." Too many are quite capable of the weeping, but the other and the far more important part they fail in altogether. But when the fruits go along with the signs of godly sorrow, then those signs are of real worth, telling as they do of the broken and contrite spirit with which God is ever well pleased.

III. SINKING OF ALL DIFFERENCES AND OLD RIVALRIES. Unity taking the place of strife. The old rivals, Israel and Judah, were united now. And the giving up of former grudges and grievances is a real sign of a genuine work of grace in the soul.

IV. INQUIRY. This was an open and practical acknowledgment of their former wrong, a real confession like the "Father, I have sinned," of the returning prodigal.

V. THE ZIONWARD FACE. Ver. 5: "With their faces *thitherward*," it is said. There are many who talk about religion, but with their faces all the while world-ward. What does our common talk, our every-day life, our ordinary spirit and conduct, declare? They show which way our face really is, no matter what our tears or inquiries have been.

VI. STIRRING ONE ANOTHER UP TOWARDS THE GOOD WAY. "Come, and let us," etc. (ver. 5). When we see men trying to win others for God, to lead men not away from him, as heretofore, but to him, we conclude that that man's repentance is real.

VII. SOLEMN COVENANTING WITH GOD. The value of such vows and covenants is that they render going back from God more difficult. They help to steady the will and confirm the wavering purpose. They commit us to the right side. It is a kind of breaking down the bridges behind us, a burning of the boats, so that the soldiers started on the enterprise may not be able to recross the river. Hence we urge such open and solemn avowal, consecration and covenanting with God. It tends to make your adhesion to God "perpetual," and your holy purpose to serve him far less likely to "be forgotten." Thus was it with Israel and Judah—never since have they fallen into idolatry, and though yet "the veil is before their faces," they are far other than what they were. And in our own Churches such consecration has again and again been greatly blessed.—C.

Ver. 6.—*Forgetting our Resting-place.* This chapter was written for the comfort of exiles in Babylon. They were told that their oppression was not to be for ever. "God giveth songs in the night." He will not utterly cast down. But before he gives comfort he clearly shows the people their sin. And one chief part of that sin was that they had forgotten their resting-places. So many generations had lived and died in the neglect of God, their Resting-place, that he had become forgotten by them. The habit of resorting to him was broken; other gods had been chosen instead. And now, in the sorrow of their exile, they knew not where to turn. Treating the subject generally, we note—

I. A PRECIOUS TRUTH IMPLIED. There is a Resting-place provided for us. Weary we often are, by reason of conscience and temptation and earthly trouble and fear. But there is a resting-place for us. "We who have believed" in the Lord Jesus Christ "do enter into rest." His one sacrifice gives rest as to the past, his intercession ensures grace sufficient for all the present and the future too, and his resurrection is the pledge that "he will redeem" *my* "life from destruction, and crown" me "with loving-kindness and tender mercy."

II. A SAD ACCUSATION MADE. That we "have forgotten," etc. Now, this is very grievous; for: 1. *It involves deep ingratitude.* Think at what a cost our rest was purchased for us. Our pardon, peace, sanctification, and life eternal were not the result of a mere wish on the part of God, but they cost the life and death of the Son of God. Ponder that vast price paid for redemption, and think what must that heart be that forgets all this—what Christ has done for us, is doing, and will do. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass," etc. (Isa. i. 3). 2. *And it is such folly.* For no more surely do we need the bread that perisheth for our bodily life than we do "the Bread of life," which is Christ, for the sustenance of our spiritual life. And this not mere theory, but all who have ever known him as our Rest, know what a Rest—how gracious, how perfect, how constant and sure!—he is. And to neglect, abandon, forget that!—"Can the force of folly further go?" It is an exchange of Eden for the wilderness, of the father's house

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for the swine-feeding and the husks, light for darkness, life for death. 3. *It causes such misery.* See the picture in the verse. It is that of a hunted, worried sheep. If that were the condition of such sheep, instead of being led by the shepherd by green pastures and lying down there by the still waters, what would its life be worth? And so with our souls; their misery betrays itself in the haggard look or the flippant laugh, or the hideous attempt to stifle all thought and memory in the wild pursuit of pleasure, of business, or—worst of all—of sin. Conscience will rebuke; memory will recall bitter times and moan, "Oh that it were with me as in times past!" Prayer and the means of grace seem unable to help; we are powerless for good; and the scorn of men of the world. Yes; thus to forget is misery indeed. 4. *And the danger is very great.* For if we do not return, we are lost. The terrible words of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (vi. 4—6) will be fulfilled in us, and then all hope is gone. "O ye children of God, ye have a Resting-place; how is it that ye can forget it? Touch upon the things of nature, how they chide you! Bring to your remembrance the birds of the air, the beasts of the forest, the dumb driven cattle accustomed to the yoke, and let them chide you; for they forget not their resting-place. Carried away to the city the other day, the dove was taken from its cage, and they let it loose, fastening to it the message that was to be sent. It mounted aloft, it whirled around awhile, that it might see where it was. It was far, far away from the dove-cote; it was found hundreds of miles away; but whither did it fly? Swift as an arrow from the bow, it sought its resting-place with the infallibility of affection; it found its nearest way to the cote where it had been reared, and brought its message safely there. And even the dog which thou despisest, taken away from its master, carried many miles away, in darkness too, so that it might not know its way, has been known to swim rivers, cross byways it could not have known, and then is found barking for admission at its master's door; oh, so happy when it hears its master's voice again. It could not rest elsewhere. O my heart, wilt thou let the pigeon outstrip thee in affection? art thou more doggish than a dog? Dost thou forget thy Lord, when dogs remember well their masters? Let us learn from them and forget our Resting-place nevermore" (Spurgeon).

III. EARNEST INQUIRY SUGGESTED. 1. *As to the source* of such forgetfulness. Sometimes it arises from mere *thoughtlessness.* Cf. the seed that fell by the wayside (Matt. xiii.). Or from the *unsubdued heart,* which likes not to retain the memory of God. Or from *the cares of this world.* The children of Israel when in Egypt could not listen to Moses by reason of the bitterness of their bondage. And yet more often from *wicked worldliness.* The hurry and drive, the everlasting rush of business, and the setting aside of everything that stands in its way, the determination to be rich at all hazards. *Unbelief* is also another cause, the materialistic doubts, the questioning that arises as to the truth of there being any such resting-place at all. And the *bewilderment caused* by sin. The soul is stunned, dazed, and has lost its powers. 2. *As to its cure.* "Let the wicked forsake," etc. (Isa. lv. 7).—C.

Vers. 19, 20.—*The forgiveness of God.* These words are a beautiful setting forth of God's abundant pardon. Concerning it note how—

I. IT BRINGS UNSPEAKABLE JOY. In the former part of this chapter (cf. ver. 6) the prophet has pictured Israel and Judah like to a driven, hunted flock of sheep, never allowed to rest in peace, worried by fierce dogs, and hence in perpetual distress. But here there is a complete contrast. The flock feeds on Carmel and Bashan, the richest pastures. The most perfect rest is theirs. The lot of the flock told of in Ps. xxiii. 2 is theirs. So full of peace and joy are they. And the forgiveness of God does bring deep joy to the soul. *The sense of such forgiveness* is very delightful—the realization that God doth no more remember our sin. And *the manifestations of that forgiveness* are also very blessed. For very generally God causes his providence to be gracious and kindly to that man whom he has pardoned. And *the fruits of it* are also blessed, in the character, the peace, the energy, the strength, it imparts. But—

II. IT IS CHALLENGED. "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for" (ver. 20). There are those who question very much the Divine forgiveness, who maintain that the sin is still where it was. Often *the forgiven man himself* does this. He cannot "read his title clear;" he trembles at the future and cannot be persuaded that God has put away his sin. He is filled with doubts and fears. But often the seeking after the

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iniquity of God's people is *done malignantly*. The enemies of God rejoice when they can find a solitary blot or blemish in the character of God's children. What a yell of triumph they raise when they light on such a discovery! Satan is "the accuser of the brethren." He is ever on the search for their iniquity. And they who are of him are ready with the charge of cant, hypocrisy, etc.; refusing to believe that there can be any such person as a real saint of God. And *pharisaically* also Israel's iniquity is frequently "sought for." See that elder son in the parable (Luke xv.). How slow he was to believe in anything but the hardened iniquity of his younger brother! A great deal may be urged in favour of his view of things. Such kindly treatment did seem unjust, putting bad and good on one level. He would not have objected—as such men, and there have been and are myriads of them, do not object—to show some little favour to a repentant sinner, after a long course of testing him and proving whether he was worthy of any further forgiveness; but to give him all at once such complete pardon, such elder sons never believe in that. And by some the iniquity of those whom God has pardoned is sought for *philosophically*. "Plato, Plato," said Socrates, "I do not see how God can forgive sins." And when we see, as we do see, how in the whole realm of nature every force goes on until it has produced its full effect—there is no loss of force anywhere—how can sin be made an exception? how can it be prevented from having its due and full effect, sad and terrible as that is? Philosophically speaking, there can be no forgiveness. What a man soweth, that *must* he also reap, in nature and measure, in kind and degree. Thus is God's forgiveness challenged. But—

III. IT IS VINDICATED. Ver. 20, "The iniquity . . . shall be sought for, and there shall be *none;* and the sins . . . and they shall not be found." The *sacrifice and the Spirit of Christ* are the vindication of God's forgiveness. *The former* by vindicating the Divine righteousness in such forgiveness. For there are two ways of accomplishing this. One is the way of condign punishment. But God desires atonement, reconciliation, as well as vindication, and therefore this way will not serve. The other the way of repentance, the accepting the contrite confession of sin, and prayer for its forgiveness. And this is the way God has chosen. Cf. "I said I will confess . . . and thou forgavest," etc.; "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit," etc. Now, this way of dealing with sinners vindicates God's righteousness. For, though we cannot offer an adequate confession, repentance, and intercession, yet, in Christ, this has been done; and when, in sympathy with him, in "the fellowship of his sufferings," and "made conformable to his death," we make our confessions and prayers, they are accepted for the sake of him who has offered perfectly the spiritual sacrifice which we can offer only imperfectly. Now, this way of dealing with sinners vindicates God's righteousness; yea, it causes sinners to be made "*the* righteousness of God in him," that is, Christ (2 Cor. v. 21). God's righteousness is thus made illustrious, conspicuous, as by no other means whatsoever. For when it is clearly seen, as in the kingdom of God it will be clearly seen, (1) the depths whence the sinner has been drawn, and (2) the glorious height of purity and excellence to which he has been by this grace of God upraised, that spectacle will silence all objections, and will prove that that way must have been a righteous way which has had such righteous results. And *the Spirit of Christ*, producing sanctity in the hearts and lives of believers, is the vindication of this way of grace to all elder sons, and, indeed, to all else who challenge what God has done.

CONCLUSION. 1. Rejoice in such forgiveness, that you have it to proclaim, to think of, to rest your soul upon. 2. Adore. What else can we do but sing our "Magnificats" to such a redeeming God?

> "Who is a pardoning God like thee?
> And who hath grace so rich and free?"

3. Come away from all self-trust, all reliance on your own deeds for justification and forgiveness. 4. Tremble, O unsaved one, to be found amongst those who have despised such grace. "How *can* we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"—C.

Ver. 23.—*Hammer versus hammer*. *Babylon* was "the hammer of the whole earth" in the days in which and of which Jeremiah wrote. Nineveh had striven to resist, as had Tyre, Syria, and Egypt, but one by one they had been crushed beneath Babylon's ponderous blow. And now Judah and Jerusalem were crushed likewise. But *God's*

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Word was that other hammer, against which even the force of the hammer of the whole earth should be put forth in vain. "Is not my Word . . . as a hammer, saith the Lord, which breaketh the rock in pieces?" (ch. xxiii. 29). And it did thus break the power of Babylon, and made her "a desolation among the nations." Now, all this is a parable of what is and long has been in the spiritual world. Note—

I. THERE IS A HAMMER-LIKE FORCE WORKING AGAINST GOOD IN THE WORLD. See how it crushes joy, innocency, purposes of good, noble endeavours, life itself. It is the kingdom of Satan; such crushing of so much that is good is of those "works of the devil" to destroy which the Son of God was manifested.

II. BUT THERE IS A GOD-LIKE FORCE WHICH SHALL PROVE A MIGHTIER HAMMER STILL. The strong one shall be driven out by the stronger. For proof of this, see: 1. *The progress of humanity.* Surely he must be blind who will deny the improvement in the general condition, conduct, and character of men since Christ lived and died on this earth. Most admit it, but ascribe it to merely secular, natural, and subordinate causes. 2. *The laws of civilized nations.* How much more just, humane, and righteous they are than they once were! 3. *The philanthropic instinct* amongst men. What abundance of objects there now are on which this instinct flings itself and toils for their good! Now, these things are, at least, "aids to faith," in a fuller and more complete deliverance of man from all evil, which it is the glory of the gospel both to promise and to promote. But see this Divine power at work in *the individual soul.* The fear which hath torment is taken away. The sin which tyrannizes is broken and subdued. The good which was weak is made strong, the evil which was strong is made weak. The sorrow which killed all joy is hushed. Death which destroyed is itself destroyed by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. These are some of the present trophies of the grace of God, and they are but an earnest of more and far better things to come. But in virtue of them we believe in the Son of God, who shall subdue all things unto himself. God's Word, God's providence, God's Spirit, all unite to testify to the existence and by-and-by the exercise of that triumphant power by which all the might of evil shall be crushed, shattered, and broken for ever. On which side, then, are we taking *our* place?—C.

Ver. 34.—*A strong Redeemer.* "Their Redeemer is strong."

I. IT WAS NECESSARY THAT HE SHOULD BE SO. 1. *This is true of Israel's Redeemer.* See the power ranged against them. *Physical,* in the might of Babylon and the many hostile nations. *Spiritual,* in the justice of the sentence under which they were suffering. *Moral,* in the enfeebling effects of their disobedience, causing despondency, despair, timidity, giving power to evil habits, and making very difficult the acquirement of such as were good. But: 2. *It is true of our Redeemer.* The powers by which humanity is held in captivity are more terrible and unconquerable than were those by which Israel was held. These powers are commonly classified under the threefold division—a trinity of hell—of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Consider the power: (1) *Of the world,* in enslaving the soul of man. The seductiveness of its smile, the terror of its frown, the overpowering force of its rewards, the awfulness of its punishments. And yet all this might is against God and against the soul. (2) *Of the flesh.* Yes; it does beat against the spirit, it warreth against the soul. If it once have gained dominion, is that dominion ever entirely destroyed while this life lasts? And in some, yea, many, its dominion is allowed as something that cannot be broken. A moral despair comes over many in regard to it, and they cease to contend against a tyranny which they affirm they are powerless to escape from. (3) *Of the devil.* He is no mere imagination, or myth, or invention of a credulous and superstitious age, but a living reality, against whom our Saviour, who knew his strength and terror as none other did—for he had just come away from his encounter with him—bade us in our daily prayer say, "Deliver us from the evil one." Who but he is it that is ever plying us with unhallowed thought and suggestion, causing the will and opportunity to sin so fatally to combine? But who of us is or can be ignorant of his devices? And when the force of all these terrible foes is augmented, as it is by the force of habit, of example, of inherited tendency, of enfeebled power of resistance the result of past defeats,—oh, what need, indeed, is there that our Redeemer should be strong! But—

II. BLESSED BE GOD, HE IS SO. In regard to *Israel,* he did redeem them in part, and

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their more complete redemption is yet to come. In regard to *humanity at large*, he is strong likewise. See in proof of this: 1. *His mighty power when here on earth.* All those signs and wonders, those glorious miracles, were designed to confirm our faith in our Redeemer as One "*mighty to save.*" Hence diseases fled, devils were cast out, nature obeyed, Death gave up her dead, at his word. All these things were, as St. John calls them, "signs." 2. *His might displayed in his Church.* "I *will* build my Church," he said; and in spite of the feebleness in numbers, in influence, in intellectual or social power, in adaptation of methods, in selection of men; in spite of all the force that numbers, wealth, power, rank, cruelty, hate, could bring to bear;—still his word was accomplished and is yet being accomplished. Must we not confess, in view of facts like these, that our Redeemer is strong? 3. *His power over the individual soul.* How he gives strength against the terror of a violated law, the might of an indwelling sin, the crushing power of earthly sorrow, the king of terrors, death itself! "Conversion is the standing miracle of the Church"—the transformations of character, condition, and conduct, which are perpetually being wrought by the power of Christ. All these compel the glad confession that Christ is "mighty to save." Now, note—

III. THAT HIS STRENGTH BECOMES OURS BY MEANS OF OUR FAITH. For faith in him brings to bear the power of: 1. *The unseen.* 2. *Gratitude.* 3. *The new life.* And so these marvels are wrought.

"Mighty Redeemer, set me free
From my old state of sin."

C.

Ver. 36.—*The liars' sword.* I. IT IS ONE WHICH THEY WIELD. It cuts asunder: 1. *The ties which bind man to man.* 2. Those which bind *the soul to truth and virtue.* 3. Those which bind *the heart to God.* 4. Those which would lead *the man to eternal life.*

II. IT IS ONE WHICH THEY FEEL. It pierces the soul with *shame*, with *anguish*, with a *deadly wound.*

III. IT IS ONE BY WHICH THEY WILL SOONER OR LATER BE DESTROYED. 1. It is often so *in this life.* Men will league themselves together against a liar as against a wild beast or serpent, to destroy it. In the hearts of all men there is a protest against lies. That protest cannot be stifled universally, or for long, or over wide reaches of the world. It will break forth. It did break forth, and down went the paganism of the Roman empire, the priestly lies of the Church of Rome in the days of the Reformation, the political lies of despots as in the French Revolution, the Jesuitical lies by which that order has been disgraced and on account of which it has once and again been driven forth in shame. And the like of all this is seen in the condemnation and punishment of the convicted liars even now. 2. But yet more will it be so *hereafter.* See the awful doom that is pronounced against liars in the Word of God: "All liars shall have their part in the lake of fire, which is the second death."

CONCLUSION. 1. Dread this sword. 2. Love and cherish truth, in thought, word, and deed. 3. Give yourself to him who is *the* Truth.—C.

Ver. 46.—*The fall of hell.* Babylon is continually taken in Scripture as the type of the kingdom of evil, that which our Saviour termed "the gates of hell." Her antiquity, her vast power, her wickedness and cruelty, her utter overthrow, all justify the similitude which St. John especially so frequently employs. But the kingdom of evil is to be destroyed. For this purpose "the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." And as when the literal Babylon fell there was a "cry," so shall it be when that yet more dread power of which she was the type shall, in its turn, fall and perish. But that cry will be of a varied nature. On the part of all those who have trusted in and served it there will be—

I. A CRY OF TERROR. Their confidence, their pride, will be shattered, and they will quail at "the wrath of the Lamb" which they have provoked. But there will be many who will behold that overthrow and from them—

II. A CRY OF WONDER will be heard. That kingdom of evil so widespread, so ancient, so established, so seemingly undisputed in its possession during all the long ages

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hitherto, now completely overthrown. How many valiant soldiers of the cross and faithful servants of God have in past ages hurled themselves against her ramparts and tried to storm her citadel, and have, apparently, but thrown their lives away! Therefore, when at length it is proclaimed, "Babylon is fallen!" what wonder and astonishment will fill the minds of all beholders! But it will be also—

III. A CRY OF JOY. It will be the day of jubilee, the setting free of the oppressed, the opening of the prison doors, the giving of liberty to the captives. Hence the psalms perpetually bid us sing unto the Lord—sing a new song; "for he cometh, he cometh to judge the earth." We are accustomed to speak of the judgment day as one of terror only; we forget that it will be a day of unspeakable joy to the multitudes of the oppressed, like as, when Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore, they sang their song of triumph. And it will be also—

IV. A CRY OF THANKSGIVING, of adoration and praise. How can it be otherwise? "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together" beneath hell's dread oppression. Shall there not be unspeakable gratitude felt when the Lord crushes this awful tyranny and destroys it for evermore?

CONCLUSION. 1. Remember that this overthrow *will* take place. They who believe in this kingdom of evil say, "We shall never be moved." But they are deceived and will, one day, be terribly awakened. 2. Which cry shall be ours?—C.

Vers. 4, 5.—*Reunited Israel seeking Jehovah.* I. THE VOLUNTARINESS OF THIS QUEST. How it is exactly that Israel becomes master of its own choice is not indicated here. Nor need we stop to notice the indications elsewhere. The great thing to note is that Israel, being free to choose, chooses the right thing. Israel might have chosen to stop in Babylon. Thus a great difference is indicated between the circumstances in which the first covenant with Israel was made, and these circumstances of the second covenant. We search the Book of Exodus in vain for any evidence of such a free and profoundly penitent spirit as we find here. God has shown by the history of Israel that a covenant made in constraint may be necessary, but also it can only be preparatory. All the elements here are of strong voluntary action. The people come; they are not driven. They weep with the noble emotion of penitence. All the waste of past centuries stands before them, seen as it might have been seen before if only they had had eyes to see. Then there is the seeking, hoping spirit to be considered. The people are *willing* now to go to God, whom so long they had forsaken in idolatry and unrighteousness.

II. THE UNION OF THOSE WHO HAD BEEN UNNATURALLY SEPARATED. Why this distinction between the children of Israel and the children of Judah? The very names indicate something wrong, something having its basis in self-will and jealousy. For the children of Judah were also children of Israel. Thus the common Christianity underlies all sectarian names. These names originate in certain historical necessities, and the sects keep them because they are thinking of the different starting-points whence they have come rather than of the common goal whither they tend. In uniting thus together, Israel and Judah were doing things meet for repentance. They were doing all they could do while they remained in exile. Past alienations and antipathies were submerged in the rise of a strong feeling of desire after their God. When men *want* to be brothers and companions, most difficulties in the way can be easily pushed aside.

III. A SUBORDINATE ELEMENT IN THE QUEST OF JEHOVAH. The people know they must turn their footsteps toward a certain place, even Zion. God is always to be sought in a certain appointed way. Seeking Zion, the people are doing a great deal towards finding God. The people knew the way to look toward Zion, even from afar; we have illustration of this in the praying attitude of Daniel, who bowed his knees three times a day, his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem. Whether we shall find God depends upon where we are disposed to seek him. We shall certainly never find him apart from Jesus Christ, nor anywhere else than as connected with the heavenly Zion, the city of the living God. The vague aspirations of natural human sentiment promise a great deal, but they perform nothing. They follow an *ignis fatuus*, and not the star that goes on till it stands over Bethlehem. God is to be found by those who will accept the guidance of his Spirit, making known to them the riches which are in Christ.—Y.

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Vers. 6, 7.—*The wolf excusing himself.* These verses remind us of the well-known fable of the wolf and the lamb. The wolf, acting according to its wolfish nature, devours the lamb, but first of all it makes a pretence of having some show of reason to go upon. So here the cruel spoilers of Israel try to make out that all their cruelty and rapacity were perfectly right, because Israel had done so much wrong. We have here—

I. A TRUE ACCUSATION. Israel's wrong-doing is not at all overstated. They have sinned against Jehovah. Nor is this accusation left in all its wide generality. Note the rendering of Naegelsbach: "Jehovah the true Pasturage and their fathers' Hope." Thus the figure begun in the previous verse is continued. For the sheep a true, ample, rich pasturage is provided and protected. The shepherd makes that pasturage with all its needs his peculiar charge. If the sheep will not have faith in their shepherd, submission to his ordinances, satisfaction with his provisions, and general content in all their appointed lot; if they prefer an erratic, self-providing, self-protecting lot;—then they must take the consequences. There was nothing wonderful in Israel having becoming a lost and miserable flock. The wrong-doing of a man does not excuse bad treatment of him by others, but it explains how bad treatment often becomes possible. If, overleaping the bounds and laws of Divine wisdom, we go of our own choice into the way of the adversary, we must not complain of consequent spoliation and suffering.

II. A BAD REASON. The adversaries of Israel made Israel's wickedness a plea for their own wickedness. We must distinguish between the conquerors of Israel as made use of by Jehovah and the purposes and feelings of the conquerors themselves. It is evidently God's principle to make use of what already exists: these people were bent on attacking the land of Israel, and, when Israel had so utterly apostatized in heart from Jehovah, there was no reason why he should defend them. The wickedness of man often wonderfully serves a Divine purpose, but that does not make it wickedness any the less. Wicked men are not necessary to God, however useful they may be in the present conditions of things. Vain will it be for any man to plead that, in the event, his wickedness has brought some good thing to light. The purposes of his heart were evil and only evil, and by those purposes he must be judged.

III. INDICATION OF THE PROPER TREATMENT. The proper treatment of the sheep that have forgotten their resting-place is fully revealed in the Gospels. There the true Shepherd is set before us, no self-indulgent one, no self-seeker, no hireling; but he who came to seek out the lost sheep, and who dies for his own. We must never forget, in all comparisons between straying men and straying sheep, that God means us thereby to be deeply impressed with the need of his provisions and protections. He who remembers that we are dust, remembers also that at the best we are as sheep, needing for the present to be watched very closely, and kept within a place of safety by all sorts of checks and constraints.—Y.

Ver. 11.—*The punishment of those who rejoice wrongly.* I. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH BABYLON SHOULD HAVE DONE ITS DESTROYING WORK. Jehovah meant Babylon for the chastisement and the humiliation of his own people, that they might be enlightened and purified through the losses they thus sustained. They lost many things they loved, but at the same time they lost things which tempted and ensnared. The description here, "Destroyers of mine heritage," indicates sufficiently the spirit in which Babylon acted. What God wanted was the thorough purification of his heritage, not at all its destruction. Babylon cared nothing as to whether Israel was better or worse for its afflictions. It could only rejoice over another nation conquered, another territory acquired, and a fresh degree of brightness added to its military glory. It is surely a terrible thing when men do good work unconsciously and not meaning it to be good work at all. When we have to engage in any work that inflicts suffering, shame, and loss on others, it ought to be under the sternest pressure of necessity and as the sorrowing ministers of violated law. There are times when we cannot escape being the agents of suffering to wicked and foolish men; but if we only act in the right spirit, keeping our hearts free from all that is vengeful and exulting, we may even have some share in turning them from their wickedness. Everything that savours of our personal satisfaction and gain must be kept away when we have to make others suffer.

II. THE CERTAIN RETRIBUTION ON THOSE WHO REJOICE IN THE SUFFERINGS OF

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OTHERS. A disposition to rejoice in this way indicates, of course, a general iniquity of life which is sure to bring retribution. But retribution will take special forms according to the sin, and those who have gloated over the humiliations of others are taking a sure way to have others gloat over them in the day of their humiliation. Israel itself, which had been rejoiced over by Babylon, had first of all been rejoicing where it ought not to have rejoiced. If we exult and insult where we ought to pity, then nothing is more certain than that we shall meet with insult in turn.

III. A DIRECTION SUGGESTED IN WHICH THERE MAY BE GREAT REJOICING. Man was made to rejoice; the pity is that so often his rejoicing comes from individual and selfish considerations. When the right spirit is in our hearts, we too shall rejoice that so many are cast down, but it will be because of the opportunities given to lift them up. There should be the greatest of gladness in serving the lowly and the needy. Thus, while there never can be joy at suffering for its own sake, there can be much joy because of the opportunities given for glorifying Christ.—Y.

Vers. 19, 20.—*The feeding-places of the flock.* Consider—

I. WHAT JEHOVAH HAD PROVIDED AND THE PEOPLE HAD LOST. Carmel and Bashan, Ephraim and Gilead, were not something altogether new. They were memories of the past as well as hopes of the future. Israel had been a scattered sheep. Out of Christ not only are we ourselves lost, but we have lost the use of the appropriate possessions of humanity. Really what God does in restoring his people is to bring them to something a great deal better than the places mentioned; but these places represent an actual, experienced good. And it is well that God should give us, as one aspect of the future, a restoration of all that was satisfying in the past.

II. JEHOVAH IS ABOUT TO RESTORE: HOW WILL THE PEOPLE USE WHAT IS TO BE RESTORED? Restoration by itself will do nothing. If the man comes back to his possessions as he went away, then he can only misuse and squander as of old. The house swept and garnished only presented to the evil spirits a chance for greater riot and defilement than before. To the old land there comes back a new people. After tasting the bitterness of wanderings, they have tasted also the powers of the world to come—old carnal temptations no longer charm, new spiritual considerations stand full in view. Formerly, even on Carmel and Bashan, Mount Ephraim and Gilead, there had been discontent, because, with all the goodness in these places, there was not enough for the carnal heart. But now, when things are used spiritually, there is enough and more than enough. If only we follow where God leads there will be ample provision and ample blessedness.—Y.

Ver. 20.—*A vain quest.* I. IN CONTRAST WITH PREVIOUS QUESTS OF THE SAME KIND. Then hardly anything but iniquity and sin were to be found. The few righteous and godly men only called attention more emphatically to the general wickedness. God is ever seeking in the earth for all that is true and good, and whatever there be of it he is sure to find. He misses nothing, searching into every man according to the fundamental thoughts of his heart. In former days sin and iniquity had been the great burden of prophetic deliverances, and the mention of them a continual exasperation to the people.

II. THE REASON WHY THE QUEST HAS BECOME VAIN. All is pardoned. There has been deep and adequate repentance, adequate atonement, and consequently there is full forgiveness. Iniquity and sin cannot be found, because they have vanished as disturbing elements in human consciousness. What an intensely evangelical verse this is, full as it can be of one of the great results of the gospel! God, who sends prophets into the midst of sinful men, calling attention to the universal presence of evil, works to remove that evil, so that it shall no longer be possible to find it. This inability to find evil is not the report of man merely; if so, we might suspect the worth of the report as being nothing more than shallow optimism. When *God* says that evil cannot be found he means that it has ceased to exist.

III. THIS VAIN QUEST IMPLIES OTHER QUESTS EQUALLY VAIN. No consequences of sin shall be left. When the roots are gone, clean extirpated, vain will it be to seek for the fruits. There can be no pain where there is no sin. There can be no death. Fulness of life and health will succeed. There will be no seed but good seed, no

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ground but good ground. And hence there will only be good fruit springing forth abundantly.

IV. ANOTHER QUEST THAT WILL BE SUCCESSFUL. The matter must be looked at positively as well as negatively. Iniquity is not to be found, *i.e.* complete conformity to Law is found everywhere; sin is not found, *i.e.* every man in his own nature is fully glorifying his Maker and his Redeemer. More and more we must seek to see the depth and reality of present iniquity and sin; so shall we better understand the work whereby God will slowly remove—slowly, that is, to our apprehension—all these evil things away—and cause harmony, holiness, and happiness to rise enduringly in their place.—Y.

Vers. 35—37.—*The sword everywhere.* I. THE DESTROYING AGENT. Not a deluge, not fire from heaven, but an ordinary human agent, working with energy and thoroughness. The weapon which Babylon in its greed of conquest had used against Jerusalem is turned against itself. First of all, Babylon looks covetously on the land of Israel, and spoils it of its people and their possessions. And then, enriched, Babylon becomes in turn an object of desire. God has only to leave covetousness and grasping alone, whether in nations or individuals. There will generally come in some human agency to dissipate ill-gotten gains. As Babylon became richer in external goods, it became weaker in manly resources. There was more to invite attack, more need of the best defences, and yet at the same time less ability to defend. The sword stands here as the great symbol of human physical force. We must not infer that God approves it: he simply points out how it must have free scope upon the surface of things. Babylon took the sword, and she in turn must perish by the sword; and that same sword, successful against Babylon, points to the destruction of those who wielded it. Nothing abiding, nothing permanently satisfying, is to be achieved by the sword.

II. THE EXTENT OF THE DESTRUCTION. Physical force can make short work of all man's natural treasures; all that is wanted is a sufficient amount of it. Skill compensates for force only up to a certain point. Vain was it for Babylon to count up its mighty men and parade its horses and chariots. If we would arrive at right conclusions in the matter of security we must know the strength of our enemies as well as our own. As to one element in its strength in particular, Babylon would be dreadfully deceived. It could not realize how, as the agent of a punishing Jehovah, there had been more than its wonted strength bestowed on it against sinning Israel. It plumed itself too much on conquered Israel, and thought itself stronger than it really was.—Y.

Ver. 46.—*Capital events in history.* Capital events in history are of two kinds. 1. Those which by the magnitude of them arrest attention and deeply impress the imagination of the world. Such was the taking of Babylon. It was like the fall of a mighty building; when the fall came, it could not but shake the earth. The effects were of necessity far-reaching. The political centre of gravity got shifted. The fall of Babylon meant a new kind of government for a great many people. It meant a total change in temporal circumstances. Then the whole thing was to a large extent unexpected. Many such events have happened in history. Great struggles between nations and confederated nations, lasting for years, come to their consummation in some battle, and then for a while there is comparative equilibrium. 2. Those which excite little or no attention at the time. The death of Christ is the crowning instance of events of this kind. Locally and for a short time it did make a deep impression, but certainly the earth was not moved, nor was there a cry heard among the nations. The movement was in spiritual regions; heaven it was that got moved; and the cry was heard among the principalities and powers in the invisible world, whether they were good ones or bad ones. We need a divinely chosen standpoint from which to measure the magnitude of terrestrial events. We enlarge where we should diminish, and diminish where we should enlarge. It has truly been said that history is too full of wars and conquerors. These have been recorded, while other events dropped into oblivion, which now we should give a great deal to understand. We must guard against letting the deepest impression on us be produced by mere noise and bulk. As history is commonly written, critical, seminal events are to be looked for in the quiet corners of it, and often they are treated in a very hasty way. If we would discover the fountains of what is really momentous in human affairs, we must be obedient to the guidance of

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God's Spirit. We must be delivered from the snares of mere national prosperity and glory. Then, conversely, in our own actions we must not be troubled if little attention is paid to them by others. A man may be sowing the seeds of immense, world-wide benefits, all unconsciously, knowing only this, that he is doing the thing, the evidently appointed work for him—lying nearest to his hand.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER LI.

Ver. 1.—Against them that dwell in the midst of them that rise up against me. The Hebrew has *lēb-kāmai*, which is *Kasdim*, or *Chaldea*, written in the cypher called Athbash (see on ch. xxv. 26); just as *Shēshach* in ver. 41 is equivalent to Babel. The question arises whether the prophet himself is responsible for this covert way of writing, or a scribe in later times (so Ewald). In favour of the former view it may be urged that Babylon and Chaldea receive symbolic names (though not in Athbash) in the connected chapter (l. 21, 31, 32); in favour of the latter, that the Septuagint has Χαλδαίους in ver. 1, and does not express Sheshach in ver. 41, also that the clause to which Sheshach belongs in ch. xxv. 26 is of very dubious genuineness. **A destroying wind**; rather, *the spirit* (*rūakh*) *of a destroyer* (or perhaps, *of destruction*). The verb rendered in this verse "raise up," when used in connection with *rūakh*, always means "to excite the spirit of any one" (ver. 11; Hag. i. 14; 1 Chron. v. 26).

Ver. 2.—**Fanners.** This is supported by the Septuagint, Peshito, Targum, Vulgate, according to the Massoretic pointing, however, we should render "enemies." Possibly the prophet intended to suggest both meanings, *ā* and *ō* being so nearly related. **Shall empty her land.** The original has a much more striking word, "shall pour out" (for the figures, comp. ch. xlviii. 12), which occurs again in similar contexts in Isa. xxiv. 1; Nah. ii. 3 (Hebrew, 2).

Ver. 3.—**Against him that bendeth, etc.** There are two readings in the Hebrew Bible—one that given by the Authorized Version; the other, "Against him that bendeth (let) him that bendeth his bow (come)." The difficulty, however, is in the first two words of the clause, which are the same in either reading. It would be much simpler to alter a single point, and render, "Let not the archer bend his bow; and let him not lift himself up in his coat of mail" (for the old word "brigandine," see on ch. xlvi. 4); which might be explained of the Babylonians, on the analogy of ch. xlvi. 6, "Let him not bend his bow, for it will be useless;" but then the second half of the verse hardly suits the first—the prohibitions seem clearly intended to run on in a connected order. On the other hand, the descriptions, "him that bendeth," and "him that lifteth himself up in his brigandine," seem hardly a natural way of putting "the Chaldean army."

Ver. 4.—**In her streets**; *i.e.* in the streets of Babylon.

Vers. 5—14.—The covenant between Jehovah and Israel is one reason why Babylon must fall; and Babylon's own guilt is another. Hence pity is out of place.

> "Here liveth piety where pity ends;
> Can any man be guilty more than he
> Whose bias with the doom of God contends?"
> (Dante, 'Inferno,' xx. 28, Cayley.)

Flee, therefore, lest ye be involved in Babylon's ruin. For Jehovah's purpose of vengeance cannot be reversed.

Ver. 5.—**Hath not been forsaken.** The Hebrew is much more forcible, "is not widowed"—alluding to the fundamental Old Testament idea of a mystic marriage between God and his people (comp. Isa. l. 1; liv. 4—6; Hos. ii.). **Was filled with sin**; rather, *with guilt* (Hebrew, *āshām*).

Ver. 7.—Babylon, as the instrument used by God for his judicial purposes, is likened to a wine-cup, which "made all the earth drunken" (comp. ch. xxv. 15, 16); and, more than this, to a golden cup, such was the impression made upon the Jewish prophets, by Babylon's unexampled splendour. (Golden cups were not unknown in Palestine; Jehu sent some to Shalmaneser; Smith, 'Assyrian Canon,' p. 114.) So, in Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the image, the head of the image is of gold (Dan. ii. 32, 38). But neither her splendour nor her honourable position as God's minister could save her from merited destruction.

Ver. 8.—**Destroyed.** The Hebrew, more forcibly, has "is broken." The Authorized Version wished, perhaps, to avoid the objection that a golden cup could not, properly speaking, be broken. But if we once begin to harmonize the language of Hebrew poetry, we shall have no end. It is not the cup which falls, but the state, considered as a house (the "breach" of God's people is constantly referred to; *e.g.* Ps. lx. 2; Isa. xxx. 26). **Howl for her.** Sympathetic bystanders are dramatically appealed to. From the next

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verse it would seem that they are the various foreigners who, whether by choice or force, have been resident in Babylon, and who have acquired an interest in her fate. Hitzig thinks the foreign mercenaries (ch. l. 37) or allies are specially referred to. **Take balm for her pain** (comp. ch. viii. 22; xlvi. 11). The images of fracture and wound are combined, as in Isa. xxx. 26.

Ver. 9.—**We would have healed Babylon.** Experience shows that it is useless to attempt to correct such inveterate evils. **Every one into his own country** (as ch. l. 16). **Her judgment**; *i.e.* her punishment. Perhaps there is an allusion to the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, burned by fire from heaven. But we might also render "her crime" (comp. Deut. xix. 6, where "worthy of death" is more strictly "a capital crime").

Ver. 10.—**Our righteousness**; literally, *our righteousnesses*; not in the sense of "righteous deeds" (as in Isa. lxiv. 6; Judg. v. 11), but "those things which prove us to be righteous; *i.e.* by punishing Babylon he hath justified us" (Payne Smith).

Ver. 11.—**Make bright**; rather, *polish*, so that the arrows may penetrate easily (comp. Isa. xlix. 2, "a polished shaft"). **Gather the shields**; rather, *fill the shields* (viz. with your arms); *i.e.* take hold of them. Comp. the phrase, "to fill the hand with the bow" (2 Kings ix. 24). The rendering "quivers" is wanting in philological authority, and seems to have been inferred from this passage, where, however, it is unnecessary. **The kings of the Medes.** The prophet speaks of the Medes and not the Persians (comp. Isa. xiii. 17). "The reason, probably, is twofold: (1) that the name *Mādai* became known to the Jews at an earlier period than *Pārās*, 'Persia;' and (2) that the generals of Cyrus were apparently Medes (*e.g.* Mazares and Harpagus, Herod., i. 157, 162)" (Cheyne's 'Prophecies of Isaiah,' ii. 275, 276). The new Cyrus-inscription throws light on the latter circumstance.

Ver. 12.—**Upon the walls of Babylon**; rather, *toward the walls* (as ch. iv. 6). The "standard" was carried before the army, to show the direction of the march. **Make the watch strong.** Not merely for the safety of the invaders, but to blockade the city. Comp. the phrase, "Watchers [a synonymous Hebrew word is used] came from a far country" (ch. iv. 16); *i.e.* besiegers. **Prepare the ambushes.** To press into the city when the besieged have made a sally (as Josh. viii. 14—19; Judg. xx. 33, 37).

Ver. 13.—Babylon is addressed as **thou that dwellest upon many waters**, with reference, not only to the Euphrates, but to the canals, dykes, and marshes which surrounded the city. **The measure of thy covetousness.** A strange expression, even when we have supplied (and have we a right to do so?) a suitable verb, such as "is full." "Measure" is, literally, *ell*, "covetousness" should rather be *gain*, or *spoil*. Another possible rendering is, "The ell-measure of thy cutting off." In fact, the root-meaning of the word rendered "gain," or "covetousness," is "to cut off;" and the figure of cutting off a man's half-finished life, like a web from the loom, is familiar to us from the psalm of Hezekiah (Isa. xxxviii. 12; comp. Job vi. 9).

Ver. 14.—**Surely I will fill thee**, etc. This is the rendering of Hitzig and Graf; the enemies are compared to locusts, as in ch. xlvi. 23. But the expression, "to fill a city with men," is more naturally taken of the increase of the population of the city; and it is better to render, with Ewald and Keil, "Even though [or, 'Surely even though'] I have filled thee with men, as with locusts, they shall raise over thee the cheer of the vintage;" *i.e.* the millions of Babylon's population will not save her from the most utter ruin. For the vintage cheer, see on ch. xxv. 30; and for the figures, see especially, Isa. lxiii. 1—6.

Vers. 15—19.—Probably interpolated from ch. x. 12—16 (the only verbal difference is in ver. 19, where "Israel" is left out before "the rod of his inheritance"). But may not Jeremiah have quoted himself? Conceivably, yes; but he would surely not have quoted such a passage here, where it spoils the context. For granting that a point of contact with ver. 14 may be found for vers. 15, 16 (Jehovah who has sworn has also the power to accomplish), yet the passage on the idols stands quite by itself, and distracts the attention of the reader.

Vers. 20—26.—Israel is now to be Jehovah's hammer, striking down everything, even the Chaldean colossus. But though Babylon may be as great and as destructive as a volcanic mountain, it shall soon be quite burnt out.

Ver. 20.—**My battle-axe**; or, *my mace*. The mace (for a picture of which, see Rawlinson, 'Ancient Monarchies,' i. 459) was a weapon constantly employed by the Assyrians and presumably by the Babylonian kings. The battle-axe was much less frequently used. But who is addressed by this terrible title? The commentators are divided, some inclining to Babylon, (1) because Babylon was the last person addressed (see ver. 14), and (2) because a similar title was given to Babylon in ch. l. 23: others to Israel, on the ground that the tenses are the same throughout the passage (vers. 20—24). The latter view is probably the best. How could Babylon be said to shatter her own "governors" and "viceroys" (for the prophet deliberately chooses the

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Babylonian official names)? The argument from the context is not very weighty; for it is clear that the connection of the parts of this prophecy is very loose. We may assume, then, that ver. 20 begins a fresh paragraph, standing quite apart from that which precedes. The objection of Graf and Keil, is that Israel could not himself be styled a "mace," it being Israel's destiny to be delivered by others. But is not a very similar statement made of Israel in Isa. xli. 15; Ps. cxlix. 7—9? (Kuenen offers a third explanation—Cyrus.) **The nations . . . kingdoms.** First the great social organisms are mentioned; next comes the military power; next the population, according to sex, age, and class.

Ver. 23.—**Captains**; rather, *governors*. It is the Hebraized form (*pekhāh*) of the official name of an Assyrian or Babylonian governor (*pakhat*). **Rulers**; rather, *viceroys;* Hebrew, *segānīn* (plural). The singular, *sāgān*, is Hebraized from the Assyrian *sakun*, Babylonian *sagun*.

Vers. 25, 26.—Another image for the destruction of Babylon.

Ver. 25.—**O destroying mountain.** The description evidently points to a volcano. (1) Jehovah says that he will roll the mountain down from the rocks, which can only be understood of the stones and lava hurled down from the crater; (2) that he will make it a "mountain of burning," *i.e.* either to a burning, or, more forcibly, a burnt-out mountain; and (3) that, as a consequence of this, its stones shall be unsuitable for the purposes of the builder. Now, Palestine, it has been clearly made out, "lies almost in the centre of one great volcanic region of the earth's surface, that, namely, which includes the basin of the Mediterranean and the provinces of Western or Central Asia. Traces of that volcanic action are found in every direction. The black basaltic rock of the Haurân, the hot springs of Tiberius and Emmaus and Gadara, the naphtha-fountains near the Dead Sea, the dykes of porphyry and other volcanic rocks that force their way through the limestone, the many caves in the limestone rocks themselves,—all these show that we are treading on ground where the forces of the hidden fires of earth have been in times past in active operation. We are, that is, in a zone of earthquakes" (Plumptre, 'Biblical Studies,' p. 136; comp. Pusey's note on Amos iv. 11). There is a striking parallel to this prophetic description in Rev. viii. 8, where the destruction of a great empire is likened to the submersion in the sea of a great burning mountain. (Vitringa has noticed the parallel.)

Ver. 26.—**And they shall not take of thee,** etc. "Of thee," *i.e.* "of the Babylonian power" personified—not "of Babylon," which was built of brick, not of stone. The figure of the mountain is still preserved.

Vers. 27—37.—A more detailed sketch of the conquest of Babylon; followed (somewhat out of the natural order) by a complaint on the part of Israel, and a promise of championship on that of Jehovah.

Ver. 27.—**Prepare the nations**; literally, *consecrate the nations;* viz. by religious rites. It is in an especial sense a religious war to which they are summoned (see on ch. vi. 4, and comp. Isa. xiii. 3). **Ararat.** Ararat appears in the cuneiform inscriptions under the form "Urartu." In Isa. xxxvii. 38 the Authorized Version renders correctly by "Armenia." The Assyrian kings, since Shalmaneser, were constantly at war with the Armenians; Assurbanipal reduced them to pay tribute. **Minni.** The Mannai of the cuneiform inscriptions. The locality of this tribe has been hitherto wrongly given as the mountain country about Lake Van. But Professor Sayce has shown that they are rather to be looked for to the south-west of Lake Urumiyeh. **A captain.** The word (*tifsar*) is singular, but is probably to be understood collectively as equivalent to "captains," like the word (*sūs*, "horse," equivalent to "horses") to which it is parallel. It is here used loosely of certain officials of the Armenians; but properly it is an Assyrian word (adopted from the Accadian or proto-Babylonian), meaning "tablet-writer," and derived, according to Friedrich Delitzsch, from *dip* or *dup*, a tablet, and *sar*, to write (Accadian words). **As the rough caterpillars.** This is the third of the four kinds of locusts mentioned in Joel i. 4; or, to speak more precisely, it is the locust in its penultimate stage, when its wings are already visible, but enveloped in horn-like sheaths, which stand up upon its back. Hence the epithet "rough," or "bristling." Keil's rendering, "as the dreadful (horrifying) locust," implies a faulty interpretation of Joel i. 4. It would be strange indeed if Joel had accumulated four synonymous terms for locust in such a peculiar context.

Ver. 28.—**The captains . . . the rulers**; rather, *the governors . . . the viceroys* (as ver. 23). **Thereof** refers to the land of Medea; **his dominion** to the King of Medea, as the suzerain of the inferior chiefs.

Ver. 29.—**Shall tremble and sorrow.** The Hebrew has "trembled and sorrowed" (or, "quaked and writhed for pain"); and in the sequel, "have stood" (*i.e.* been ratified by the event, as ch. xliv. 28). The prophet here, as so often, regards what is still future as past from the point of view of eternity.

Ver. 30.—Despair of the Babylonian warriors. **Have forborne to fight** should rather be *have ceased to fight*. In their

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holds. The word is used of hill or mountain fastnesses (comp. 1 Sam. xxiii. 14, 19; Judg. vi. 2; 1 Chron. xi. 7), and such presumably are referred to here. **Their might**; rather, *their courage*. **They have burned**, etc. The subject is "the enemies." **Her bars**; viz. those with which the city gates were secured (comp. Isa. xlv. 2; Amos i. 5).

Ver. 31.—**One post shall run to meet another**, etc. The wall being broken through at various points, couriers would meet each other on their way to the royal palace. This was itself a fortress in the centre of the city, on the Euphrates. The newly discovered cylinder-inscription, however, shows that Nabonidus, the last King of Babylon, was not actually in the city at the time of the capture. **At one end**; rather, *from end to end* (see on ch. l. 26).

Ver. 32.—**And that the passages are stopped**; rather, *are seized* (as ch. xlviii. 41). Babylon, it should be remembered, was divided nearly in half by the Euphrates. It was guarded, says Professor Rawlinson, "by two walls of brick, which skirted them along their whole length. In each of these walls were twenty-five gates, corresponding to the number of the streets which gave upon the river; and outside each gate was a sloped landing-place, by which you could descend to the water's edge, if you had occasion to cross the river. Boats were kept ready at these landing-places to convey passengers from side to side; while for those who disliked this method of conveyance, a bridge was provided of a somewhat peculiar construction" ('Ancient Monarchies,' ii. 514). **The reeds they have burned with fire.** This rendering is no doubt tenable, though it gives an unusual meaning to the first noun. The "reeds" would be those of the marshes in the neighbourhood of Babylon; and Kimchi suggests that these would be cut down to facilitate the entrance of the army into the city. Surely a very forced explanation. The natural meaning of the first noun is "pools" or "lakes," and, considering that Herodotus (i. 185) speaks of a lake in connection with the defences of Babylon, it has been thought (*e.g.* by Vitringa) that the prophet may refer to something which was to happen to this and similar lakes; "burned with fire" is then regarded as a hyperbolical expression equivalent to "dried up" (comp. ver. 36). This, however, is hardly less forced than the first interpretation; and we seem almost compelled to assume a corruption of the text, and to read (for *'agammin*) *'armōnim*, palaces. If "palaces" (*i.e.* lofty houses, for such is the etymological meaning) were not uncommon at Jerusalem (Isa. xxxii. 14), much more frequent must they have been at Babylon. Or perhaps the prophet refers to the two magnificent royal palaces, which, together with the temple of Bel, constituted the wonders of Babylon. They were on opposite sides of the river, and were guarded with triple enclosures, the circumference in the one case amounting to sixty stadia (nearly seven miles), and in the other to thirty (Rawlinson, 'Ancient Monarchies,' ii. 514, etc.).

Ver. 33.—**It is time to thresh her**; rather, *at the time when it is trodden* (i.e. made level by treading or trampling); comp. Isa. xxi. 10; Micah iv. 13.

Ver. 34.—The Jewish captives are introduced, describing the offences of Babylon. **Hath devoured me**; rather, *hath devoured us*, and so on. "My delicates" (delights), however, is correct. **He hath made me**; rather, *he hath set us* (*down*) *as*. **Swallowed me up like a dragon**; or, literally, *like the dragon*. Comparing this with ver. 44, it is difficult not to see an allusion to the Babylonian myth of the Serpent, who in the fight with Marduk (Merodach) devoured the tempest, which rent asunder her belly. The cuneiform text is given in *Transactions of Society of Biblical Archæology*, vol. iv. part 2, appendix plate 6. Part of it runs thus—

25. *ip-te-va* *pi-i-sa* *Ti-amtu* *a-na*
Opened also her mouth Tiamtu to
la-h-a-h-sa
swallow it.

26. *rukhu* *limnu* *yus-te-ri-ba* *a-na*
The evil wind he caused to enter into
la *ca-par* *sap-ti-sa*
the uncovering of her lips [= into her lips before she could close them]

27. *iz-zu-ti* *rukhi*
violent (were) the winds (which).
car-sa-sa *i-tsa-mi-va*
her belly filled; and

28. *in-ni-kud* *lib-ba-sa* *va*
she was pierced in her heart and
pa-a-sa *yus-pal-ki* (?)
her mouth it caused to divide.[1]

Readers of Smith's 'Chaldean Genesis' will remember Tiamtu the dragon, and the representations thereof given from the gems. In line 27 the word rendered "her belly" contains the Babylonian analogue of the word rendered in this verse "his belly" (*k'rēs*). **With my delicates, he hath cast me out**; rather, . . . *cast us out*; or, *from my delights he hath cast us out*. For the variation of person, comp. Judg. xi. 19, "Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place;" and on the whole phrase, Micah ii. 9, ". . . ye have cast out from their pleasant homes."

[1] From a private letter of Professor Sayce's.

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Ver. 35.—**And to my flesh**; rather, *and my (eaten) flesh* (comp. Micah iii. 3). **Inhabitant**; rather, *inhabitress*; i.e. virgin inhabiting.

Ver. 36.—**Her sea**; *i.e.* the Euphrates (comp. Isa. xxi. 1), or perhaps the lake dug by Nitocris to receive the waters of the Euphrates, Herod., i. 185 (Payne Smith). Comp. on "the reeds," ver. 32. **Her springs**; rather, *her reservoirs*. There are no "springs," remarks Dr. Payne Smith, in the flat alluvial soil of Babylonia. The Hebrew word *mākōr* is used here collectively for the whole system of canals and reservoirs for the storing of the water.

Ver. 37.—**Heaps**. "Vast 'heaps,' or mounds, shapeless and unsightly, are scattered at intervals over the entire region where it is certain that Babylon anciently stood" (Rawlinson, 'Ancient Monarchies,' ii. 521). **Dragons**; rather, *jackals*.

Vers. 38—49.—Fall of Babylon; joy of the whole world.

Vers. 38, 39.—**They shall roar. . . . In their heat**; rather, *They may roar . . . (yet) when they wax warm (with lust) I will prepare*. The banquet which Jehovah will prepare is the "cup of bewilderment" spoken of in Ps. lx. 3; comp. Isa. li. 17 (*i.e.* a calamitous judgment).

Ver. 40.—**I will bring them down**, etc. (comp. Isa. xxxiv. 6; Ezek. xxxix. 18).

Ver. 41.—**How is Sheshach taken!** The Septuagint omits "Sheshach" (see, on the name, ch. xxv. 26), and very possibly rightly.

Ver. 42.—**The sea is come up**, etc. It is not clear whether this is to be taken literally or metaphorically (of the sea of nations, comp. ver. 55). Probably it is meant literally. It is said that the annual inundations of the Euphrates at present render many parts of the ruins of Babylon inaccessible.

Ver. 44.—**Bel**; *i.e.* Merodach, the patron deity of Babylon (see on ch. l. 2). **Swallowed up**. An allusion to the myth mentioned above (see ver. 34). That which Bel, *i.e.* Babylon, has "swallowed up" is not only the spoil of the conquered nations, but those nations themselves. **Yea, the wall of Babylon shall fall**; literally, *is fallen* (is as good as fallen). The famous wall of Babylon (comp. ver. 58) is described by Herodotus (i. 179, 181). From this clause down to the first half of ver. 49 is omitted in the Septuagint.

Ver. 46.—**And lest your heart faint**, etc.; rather, *and* (*beware*) *lest*, etc. **A rumour shall both come**; rather, *for a rumour shall come*. The war, then, will last some time, and all kinds of rumours will be in the air. Keil compares Matt. xxiv. 6.

Ver. 48.—**From the north**. The same statement as in ch. l. 3, 9, 41.

Ver. 49.—**As Babylon hath caused**, etc. The verse is very difficult. Ewald and others render thus: "Not only must Babylon fall, O ye slain ones of Israel, but slain ones of the whole earth have fallen because of Babylon." But why this address to the slain ones of Israel? Besides, the antithesis indicated in the Hebrew is thereby destroyed. Keil explains the antithesis thus: "Just as Babylon was intent on the fall of slain ones in Israel, so also there fall because of Babylon slain ones of all the earth," viz. because there are to be found, in the capital of the empire, people from all quarters of the world, who are slain when Babylon is conquered. A better antithesis seems to be gained if we follow the Peshito, and read, at the end of the verse, "*in* the whole earth." It will then be asserted by the prophet that, just as Babylon was the cause of the slaying of Israelites, so (as a punishment) the Babylonian fugitives shall be slain wherever they may wander.

Vers. 50—58.—Conclusion of the prophecy.

Ver. 50.—**Ye that have escaped the sword**. Evidently Jews are the persons addressed. It is not, however, perfectly clear whether the escape is from the sword of Babylon or from that of Divine vengeance. The parallel of Isa. xxiv. 14 would suggest the latter; but in the following verses the fall of Babylon is described as still to come. **Stand not still**. Lest ye be overtaken by the judgment.

Ver. 51.—**We are confounded**. A reflection of the exiles, expressing their deep shame at the ignominy which has been their lot. **Are come**; or, *came*.

Ver. 53.—**The height of her strength**; *i.e.* her lofty walls and towers.

Ver. 55.—**The great voice**; rather, *the loud sound*; i.e. the tumult of the city. **When her waves**; rather, *and her waves*; i.e. the conquering hosts (comp. ch. xlvi. 7).

Ver. 56.—**The Lord God of recompenses shall**, etc.; rather, *The Lord is a God of recompense; he will*, etc.

Ver. 57.—**Her captains, and her rulers** (see on ver. 23).

Ver. 58.—**The broad walls of Babylon . . . and her high gates**. See Herod., i. 179, 181, and the parallel accounts from other authors, cited by Duncker ('Hist. of Antiquity,' iii. 373, etc.), who taxes Herodotus with exaggeration, but admits as probable that the walls were not less than forty feet broad. **Utterly broken**; rather, *destroyed even to the ground* (literally, *made bare*). **The people**; rather, *peoples*.

Vers. 59—64.—*Epilogue*. **The word**, etc. (see ver. 61). **Seraiah**. Apparently the brother of Baruch. **With Zedekiah**. The Septuagint has "from Zedekiah," which is referred by Bleek and Grätz. It would thus be an embassy, of which Seraiah was the head. According to the ordinary read-

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ing, Zedekiah went himself. **A quiet prince.** Not so. The Hebrew means probably, "in command over the resting-place," *i.e.* he took charge of the royal caravan, and arranged the halting-places. But the Targum and the Septuagint have a more probable reading (not, however, one involving a change in the consonants of the text, "in command over the gifts," *i.e.* the functionary who took charge of the presents made to the king. M. Lenormant speaks of an official called "magister largitionum" (*bel tabti*) in the Assyrian court ('Syllabaires Cunéiformes,' par. 1877, p. 171).

Ver. 61.—(Comp. l. 3; li. 26.) **And shalt see, and shalt read;** rather, *See that thou read.*

Ver. 64.—**And they shall be weary.** Accidentally repeated from ver. 59 (see introduction to ch. l.). **Thus far, etc.** Proving that the Book of Jeremiah once ended with ch. li.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 5.—"*Suffering, but not forsaken.*" Israel is not forsaken because she is driven from her home. Babylon is not more favoured because she flourishes for a season as a "golden cup in the Lord's hand." For the land of the Chaldeans is filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel. Thus the truth is quite contrary to appearances.

I. WHEN GOD CHASTISES HIS PEOPLE HE MUST NOT BE THOUGHT TO HAVE FORSAKEN THEM. The chastisement is for their own good. It is, therefore, a proof that God has not neglected them. Instead of being an indication of hatred or indifference, chastisement is a sign of God's love. Moreover, when his people suffer God is peculiarly near to them. Those captives who hung their harps on the willows by the rivers of Babylon found God more present than he had been to the careless sinful Jews who assembled in the courts of his temple. It is to be remembered that God is near to us when we do not perceive him, and often nearest in those dark hours when bitterness of soul prevents us from having any comforting hope in him.

II. THOUGH GOD WILL CHASTISE HIS PEOPLE HE WILL NEVER FORSAKE THEM. This is a further step. Not only is the chastisement no proof of God's having forsaken his people, but in no case will he forsake them; no such proof can ever be found. True, they may be separated from God and may become "castaways;" but this is only because they forsake him. He is ever true to his side of the covenant. Let us, therefore, be prepared to expect the chastisement, but also be well settled in faith that the far worse trouble, the neglect of our souls by God, can never come.

III. OUTWARD CIRCUMSTANCES ARE NO INDICATIONS OF OUR RELATIONS WITH GOD. The great contrast between Israel and Babylon furnishes a striking instance of this truth. It is strange. For one would have thought that the outward and inward life would harmonize. So they will ultimately. Then the "golden cup" will be broken and the suffering child of God exalted to honour. But now the world is in confusion, evil is allowed a certain liberty for the consequent discipline of good, and thus the sufferers may be near to God while the fortunate and happy are far away in sin.

Ver. 10.—*Public thanksgiving.* In the destruction of Babylon and the restoration of Israel the devout sufferers of the Captivity see the justification of their conduct which had lain under a shadow while they shared in the punishment of their guilty brethren. So happy an issue from their troubles calls for devout gratitude, and this finds its expression in hymns of praise and public thanksgiving.

I. PRAISE IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP. Two faults may be observed in much of our worship—both arising from our centring it in ourselves. 1. It is *too selfish.* We are more earnest in prayer than in praise. In sore need we cry out with terrible anxiety; but when the need is satisfied we return thanks in poor and faint tones. We are eager to obtain blessings for ourselves, but little desirous of glorifying God. Yet the essence of worship is self-surrender. We degrade it and contradict its spirit when we make it serve the ends of self-seeking. 2. It is *too subjective.* We dwell much on our own feelings instead of going out of self in the contemplation of God. Consequently our worship is pitched too much in the minor key. We wail out. "Miserere" when we should be shouting "Magnificat." We have much to say about our low estate, but little concerning the way in which God has regarded it. But the highest worship is adoration—the going out of self in wonder,

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love, and praise towards the glory of God. It would be well if we made less mention of our own feelings and were more ready to "declare the work of the Lord our God."

II. PRAISE MUST BE DEFINITE IF IT IS TO BE EARNEST. Much of our worship is vapid and senseless because it is expressed in big vague phrases which carry little thought to our minds. 1. We should praise God by *declaring his works.* It is his character that we adore. But we see and realize this as it is reflected in his works. We see the glory of the sun, not by gazing with eagle vision into its dazzling centre, but by looking abroad on the many hues that it casts on land and sea and sky. We cannot see the glory of God by abstract speculations on divinity; we must study his works in nature, providence, and redemption. 2. We should praise God by noting *those particular works which affect our experience.* This is the secret of earnest praise. The Jews declare the works they have witnessed; *i.e.* the special blessings of the restoration. Each man can call to mind some of the blessings he has personally enjoyed, and in the consideration of these see good ground for glorifying God.

III. THE EXPRESSION OF PRAISE SHOULD BE PUBLIC. The people come together; they assemble at Zion, the place of public worship; they declare—make public—the works of God. This is fitting for many reasons. 1. It *glorifies God.* This is the only way in which we can glorify him. We cannot add to his glory, but we may reflect it. 2. It *increases our own thankfulness.* Joy is sympathetic. By sharing it we increase it. 3. It *leads others to see the same glory and goodness of God.* A song of praise is the most effectual sermon on the grace of God; for it is (1) the language of experience, (2) an expression of feeling, and (3) a vivid representation of "the works of the Lord our God."

Ver. 19.—(See homily on ch. x. 16.)

Ver. 20.—*God's battle-axe.* I. GOD SOMETIMES WORKS DESTRUCTION. He does not delight in destruction. It is not his chief work. But he has performed it and he may again. When a thing is absolutely evil it is best that it should cease to be. For the prevention of further evil it must be destroyed. The Creator then becomes the destroyer.

II. GOD USES HUMAN INSTRUMENTS. He might have sent death, as he created life, with a word. But he chose to use a weapon, "a battle-axe," *i.e.* a human instrument. Thus (1) he honours good men by making them his servants, and (2) he counteracts the evil influence of bad men by overruling it for ends of Divine judgment.

III. THEY WHO CANNOT SERVE GOD IN THE HIGHER WORK MAY YET SERVE HIM IN SOME NEEDFUL MISSION. The man who cannot become a prophet may act as "God's battle-axe." In God's great kingdom there is work for all classes and kinds of men. Rough and rude natures may find some mission. Still the highest mission is not that of destruction. The most worthy servant of God is he who follows Jesus Christ and "goes about doing good."

Ver. 45.—*Flight from the city of Destruction.* As Christ advised his disciples to flee from Jerusalem when the judgment of heaven was about to fall, Jeremiah here calls upon the Hebrew residents in Babylon to escape from the doomed city. The parallel suggests that similar circumstances may render similar conduct again desirable.

I. THE SINFUL WORLD IS A CITY OF DESTRUCTION. The world as God created it is good and safe. But man has made the world a dangerous place by his abuse of its lower properties. Thus the worldly spirit is an evil spirit, and the prince of this world is the supreme power of wickedness. Jesus Christ blended together his picture of the destruction of Jerusalem with a larger vision of the end of the world. In what way the wider and more distant fulfilment of his prophecy will come about we cannot tell; the day of it is known to no man, not even to the "Son of man" (Matt. xxiv. 36). Meanwhile the world lies under a certain doom. It has been so corrupted and abused that to yield to its spirit, to follow its ways, to live mainly for its advantages, is to court ruin.

II. THE CHRISTIAN IS URGED TO FLEE FROM THIS CITY OF DESTRUCTION. (2 Cor. vi. 16—vii. 1.) It would seem that the sharp line of separation between the world and the Church is melting away. Perhaps it was somewhat stiff and arbitrary. Many innocent

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things were once put under the ban which most of us would not now think of condemning, and an unhealthy sanctimoniousness was fostered by the idea that strictness was holiness. We are growing more free and more reasonable in some respects, learning that "every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified through the Word of God and prayer." Moreover, we may hope that the Spirit of Christ has penetrated into the world beyond the boundaries of the Church, so that the very atmosphere of worldly society is more or less permeated by purifying Christian ideas. Nevertheless the approach of the world and the Church is mutual. If the world is coming nearer to the Church, the Church is in some respects approaching the world. A worldly spirit in business, in pleasure, even in religion, is too apparent. We forget that we are pilgrims and strangers here and seek another city. We live too much as if worldly prosperity were the goal of life. We need to be reminded that "this is not our rest," that in so far as we yield to the spirit of worldliness we court the doom of the city of Destruction.

III. THE CHRISTIAN'S FLIGHT FROM THE CITY OF DESTRUCTION MUST BE SPIRITUAL. Jews were to flee bodily from Babylon and Christians from Jerusalem. But the flight we need is wholly different in character. Monks and hermits thought to flee from the world by hiding within still cloisters or far away among desert solitudes. But they made a double mistake. They neglected their duty to the world and yet they did not escape from the evil of it. We may carry the world into the wilderness, for it is in our hearts. While we have bodies and live on the earth no change of place will be an escape from the world. Then we have a mission to fulfil, and no pretence of care for our own souls can excuse us for shirking the work of life; certain views of salvation are often put forth according to which Christianity is supreme selfishness—the saving of one's own soul even though others suffer. These are false. The great duty of the Christian is to live for the good of his fellow-men. To do this he must be in the world. Intercourse with the world for such a purpose is right. It is foolish to visit an infected locality for pleasure, but divinely charitable to do so to minister to the sick. The flight from the world must be escape from its spirit, its evil influence, its sinful delights. Christ prays, not that we shall be taken out of the world, but that we shall be saved from the evil of it. Through him we may have this deliverance, because he has "overcome the world."

Ver. 50.—*The duty and encouragement of the saved.* I. THE DUTY. "Stand not still." 1. *Why the duty is requisite.* Past deliverance is no security for the future. The first arrow missed the mark, but the second may strike. The tide advances; though the waves have not yet reached us, they will overwhelm us if we remain where we are. (1) It is possible to avoid one earthly trouble and succumb to another—to escape the sword and fall a prey to the pestilence. (2) It is possible to escape much distress in this world and then to fall under a terrible doom in the next world. (3) It is possible to be safe now from the terrible effects of sin and to yield to future temptation and so bring upon our heads ruin in the future. 2. *How the duty is to be performed.* (1) We must be prayerful. As the danger is ever renewed so must the grace be. Therefore we need to be always seeking aid from heaven. (2) We must be watchful. New dangers may arise at any moment. (3) We must be anxious to flee from evil. Our whole course must be with the back to the city of Destruction. (4) We must be diligent. The attainments of the past will not suffice. Forgetting those things which are behind, we must press forward. The Christian's safety is not in indolent reliance upon Christ, but in trustful obedience.

II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT. "Remember the Lord from afar, and let Jerusalem come into your mind." 1. God's grace in the past is an encouragement for the future. Past deliverances will not secure us against future danger, but they will furnish reasons for seeking safety again in God. 2. The chief reason for pressing diligently and hopefully forward is to be found in the contemplation of God. His holiness should make us fear sin; his love should make us trust in his helping grace. That we may not stand still, we should "remember the Lord." 3. Our very remoteness from God should urge us not to stand still. We may have wandered far from God in sin, or have forgotten him among the crowd of worldly distractions. But when we realize our condition, when we come to ourselves, we shall see that our only safety will be in arising and going to our Father. We can never be too far to return by Christ "the Way." The further

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we are from God the greater is our danger, the nearer we approach him the more of his grace and help shall we enjoy. 4. Thoughts of our mission and destiny should induce us not to stand still. The Jews are to remember Jerusalem, their ancient home, the seat of their future destinies. If there were no such city they might despair in their exile. The thought of Jerusalem suggests a centre of union and an aim for the future. If a man loses all hope, he loses himself. When we think of our possible future and of our mission, we are roused to take up the tangled threads and weave our life's work with patience according to the pattern of God's will.

Vers. 52—64.—*The book cast into the river.* I. MEN DO NOT SUFFER FOR THEIR SINS WITHOUT WARNING FROM GOD. Seraiah was to go to Babylon and see that he read there the words of the prophecy concerning the city. God has warned us of the doom of sin, and he has sent the warning to us. We have not to search for it. It sounds in our ears. It is written large in the Bible. It is repeated in the lessons of providence.

II. IF A DIVINE WARNING IS DISREGARDED IT IS USELESS TO THE DOOMED. The prophecy seems to have had little or no effect on the people of Babylon. No doubt it was sent in mercy like Jonah's preaching against Nineveh, to lead the people to repentance. But if they failed to repent, the Divine message could afford no protection. Unless we are influenced by the Bible, it will be useless for us to hold it in our hands. It can be then only a witness against us. Neither the mere possessor of Scripture, nor the reader, nor the student of it finds a way of safety in its teachings, but only he who follows its truths in practice. He who hears Christ's sayings and *does* them builds on the rock.

III. WHEN A DIVINE WARNING IS PROVED TO BE INEFFECTUAL, IT MAY BE WITHHELD. The book, no longer of use, is to be cast into the river and sunk with a stone attached to it. The voice of conscience grows silent from being long unheeded. While men neglect to obey the teachings of Scripture, they harden themselves against the reception of them. If there is no more warning, they may grow careless as though there were no more danger. They should rather take this silence as ominous of the approaching destruction which the warning has been ineffectual in urging them to escape.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 5.—*Divine love not to be severed from its object.* A marvellous statement. A down-trodden, sinful remnant of his people, who had broken every engagement of his covenant, is still owned and cared for.

I. A PROOF OF THE FAITHFULNESS AND LONG-SUFFERING MERCY OF GOD. 1. Having entered into covenant relations with Israel, he will not withdraw from them, even although their portion of the agreement has not been kept. He remains faithful, notwithstanding human unfaithfulness. The awful guilt of the elect nation cannot invalidate the obligations God has imposed upon himself. He is ready, therefore, at any moment to fulfil these when the conditions are complied with. 2. But it is rather to be taken as illustrating Divine mercy. The purposes of his love are never laid aside. He devises schemes of salvation when we are yet sinners. 3. Though hidden from human eyes, Divine love works continually and through all things. It was hard for mere men to see the favour of God in such times. Many of the Israelites themselves, doubtless, imagined themselves forsaken. Yet was redemption nearer to them in Babylon than when at Jerusalem they insulted and disobeyed him. "*All things* work together for good to them that love God," etc.; "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job xiii. 15).

II. A REVELATION FULL OF WARNING AND ENCOURAGEMENT. 1. *The enemies of the Church are not to presume upon her misfortunes.* 2. *The Church itself, although cast down and feeble, is to be of good courage, for it is not cast off.* Adversity is not forsakenness. "Lo, I am with you alway." There is no room for presumption, for the chastisements of love have greater severities in store for aggravated guilt. But, relying on the grace of God, it may arise and recommence the mission it has forsaken.—M.

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Vers. 6, 50.—*The duty of separating from the world.* I. IN WHAT SENSE OBLIGATORY UPON THE CHILDREN OF GOD. 1. *Spiritual detachment is always the duty of saints.* In heart and life they are to be separate unto the Lord. Their motives, ulterior aims, and dispositions are to be such as the Holy Spirit creates and fosters. They obey the law of the resurrection-life, and "seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, setting their affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. iii. 1, 2). 2. *Physical removal may be requisite* when (1) all hope of saving or benefiting sinful men is at end; or (2) there is danger that we shall yield to the temptations of their society, or encourage them in their evil courses, and thus share their curse. The Jews were to seek the peace of Babylon so long as that was possible; to share in civic life, business pursuits, and social intercourse, until this prophecy came to their knowledge.

II. THE MOTIVES AND AIMS THAT ARE TO INFLUENCE US IN DOING THIS. They are not selfish. It is only when spiritual interests are at stake. There must be no idleness or lingering when the call of duty comes. The Jew was to arise and seek his long-forsaken land at once. His motives were: 1. *Allegiance to God.* He was to "remember the Lord afar off." God was indeed near to him, even there in Babylon. He is to seek more closely to serve and honour him. And this ought ever to be the aim of Christians: "a closer walk with God." And if he be spiritually minded, he will feel the attraction of the Divine presence and the blessedness of the Divine communion, which far more than make up for temporal loss or sorrow incurred for conscience' sake. It is the special duty of Christians to call upon God and obey him when amongst those who do not know his Name. 2. *The interests of the kingdom of God on earth.* God sought to separate and sanctify to himself a peculiar people in olden time, that it might witness to his truth. He still seeks to gather a spiritual Church, whose communion consists of those who are redeemed by the blood of his Son. Through its manifold ministries he is carrying out the salvation of the world. Every Christian is bound to connect himself with it in some form or other, and to take his part in its worship and work. The language of the ancient exile might well be adopted by every member of the new Israel—Ps. cxxii.; cxxxvii. 5, 6.—M.

Ver. 10.—*Praise the outcome of saintly experience.* These are the words of Jeremiah, but there can be little doubt he is but instinctively interpreting the emotion that must fill the breasts of his countrymen when his predictions were accomplished. As a representative Israelite, he expresses the deep-seated impulse that is felt when the greater providences and special spiritual deliverances of life are realized.

I. EXPERIENCES OF SAVING GRACE AN OCCASION OF THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE. We owe thankful recognition to God for our creation, preservation, and the recurring mercies of our temporal life; but there are stronger emotions awakened by the experiences of grace in the spiritual nature. 1. *Notice some of these.* This deliverance from Babylon. Conversion, or the rescue of the soul from the spiritual Babylon. The triumphs of the gospel; faithfulness of saints; increase of spiritual power and influence; preservation of Christian institutions in times of spiritual apathy or persecution; evangelization of heathen lands, etc. Special answers to prayer, or peace and comfort in private fellowship with our heavenly Father. 2. *Their general character.* "*The Lord hath brought forth our righteousness*" ("righteousnesses"). This deliverance was a great act of *judgment.* The cause of God's people was vindicated, and the guilt of Babylon avenged (cf. Ps. xxxvii. 6). The whole world was witness of the character and meaning of the event. And this is the element in all the experiences of grace that awakens special thanksgiving—they are manifestations of Divine righteousness in the life of men; triumphs of truth and holiness and love.

II. THE SPECIAL DUTY TO WHICH THEY CALL US. 1. *Declaring and interpreting God's work to men,* (1) by word; (2) by work. 2. *Public celebration in God's house.* Zion was the most fitting and representative place for such a duty. Public worship should be linked with the experiences of private devotion and the spiritual life. Public and common praise is the privilege and delight of Christians.—M.

Ver. 6.—"*Escape for thy life!*" "Flee out of the midst of Babylon," etc. This word was addressed to those who should be found in Babylon when the day of ven-

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geance came upon her (cf. Gen. xix. 15). And it seems to anticipate what was afterwards the fact—that many of the Jews would not care to go away from Babylon. Note—

I. WHO ARE TO ESCAPE. This word was not addressed to all. Many of God's people did "let Jerusalem come into their mind," and, as soon as ever opportunity was given them, they returned to their own land. But there were many who chose to stay. They had long dwelt in Babylon. They had got to like her rule, for they had prospered in this world's wealth. The surrounding idolatries did not "vex" their souls. They felt secure in her; they had become morally and spiritually enslaved. Hence they would not return with their brethren when the opportunity came. And how like is the position of men now! They are in bondage and spiritual captivity under the power of "the prince of this world." Some have heard the word and have escaped, but others care not to flee. They are content to be where and as they are.

II. WHENCE THEY ARE TO ESCAPE. Babylon stands for the kingdom of evil, which is ruled over by the spirit of evil. Now, that kingdom is fitly represented by Babylon. The power, the attractiveness, the fascination, the deceptiveness, the widespread and long-continued rule of the one find their type and likeness in the other. And the unwillingness which was felt by the great majority of Jews to quit Babylon is paralleled by the more sad unwillingness to abandon that kingdom of evil which God is ever bidding us escape and flee from.

III. WHY WE ARE TO ESCAPE. It is "for our life." This cannot be taken literally of the Jews in Babylon. For, so far as this life was concerned, they prospered greatly under the Persian rule (cf. Book of Esther in proof). And their descendants lived on right down to the times of the apostles, and were those "of the dispersion" of whom we read in the New Testament. But for the most their national and spiritual life was lost by their disobedience to this command. They ceased to be Jews, and were absorbed in the heathen nations around. And, of course, their religious life perished at the same time (see histories of the Captivity). And so in regard to the spiritual analogies of these events. Men will not, do not, literally lose this life by refusing to come away from the kingdom of evil into the kingdom of God. On the contrary, they seem to flourish greatly. The prosperity of the ungodly has been a notorious and perplexing fact in all ages of the world. And it is a sore temptation and trial to those who feel the drawings of the kingdom of God. And the temptation can only be overcome by remembering that the *life of the soul* depends upon our obedience to this word. It is when the unseen and the eternal are seen by faith that the gloss and glamour of the world are seen at their real and poor value, and the solid worth of the kingdom of God is confessed and yielded to. The angels had to "hasten" even "just Lot," though the fire of the Lord was on the point of descending on "the cities of the plain." And how we need hastening now! How slow to believe that judgment is nigh! For with the advent of death that judgment begins to every soul that enters into eternity unforgiven and unsaved.

IV. HOW WE SHALL ESCAPE. The one all-essential question is—Do you really wish to? For if there be the genuine desire, the path of escape will be soon revealed. No directions are of any use until this desire be awakened in the soul. But where it exists, it will express itself in what the Bible calls "seeking the Lord." And, as this is continued, there will be deepened in the soul that hatred of sin and aspiration after holiness which lie at the root of all true religious life. Repentance will thus be formed within the soul, and will be fostered by careful obedience to the will of God as declared in his Word. But—

V. WHITHER SHALL WE ESCAPE? There is but one answer to this. To the Lord Jesus Christ. It is as we look up to him in lowly, earnest trust, renouncing all self-reliance, that the new life is begotten in us, and we are grafted in him, and so become "new creatures," as St. Paul tells, and so are we *in* the kingdom of God, and clean escaped from the kingdom of the evil one. We are pardoned, accepted, made possessors of the Holy Ghost and of eternal life.—C.

Ver. 10.—*The response of the redeemed.* "The Lord hath . . . come, and let *us*," etc.

I. WHAT THE LORD HATH DONE. "Brought forth our righteousness." Now, by this we may understand: 1. *The Lord hath brought forth*, made known, revealed, *him who is our Righteousness* (cf. homily on "*The Lord our Righteousness*," vol. i. p. 527). By

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his representative character, what is done by him is as done by us. "We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead" (2 Cor. v. 14). There is nothing unreasonable in this. We are perpetually *imputing* to others what is not in them or but very faintly in them. We do so when we treat strangers with all kindness for the sake of those—some honoured and beloved ones—who commend them to us. We cause to flow over on them the worth and goodness of those by whom they are commended. They may not merely be strangers, but unworthy and evil, and yet, for the sake of others, we deal with them, not as they are, but as those are from whom they come. So is the Lord Jesus our Righteousness, blessed be his Name! 2. *The Lord hath brought forth righteousness in us.* But for him there would have been no righteousness at all. Some speak of "natural goodness." There is no such thing. *All* goodness, like all light, has but one source. Divines tell of ruined arches, stately pillars, etc., relics of the noble fabric that once was. But Scripture rather teaches that sin wrought death. If, then, there be aught that is beautiful and good, fair and righteous—and there is, and much—it is not a relic, but a new creation. It comes from him who is "the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John i.; cf. Jas. i. 16). And when a man yields up his soul to Christ, then—vitally grafted into him, the true Vine, and having become a living branch—he will more and more yield the fruit of righteousness, as he never did or could before. 3. *The Lord hath brought forth his covenant.* That is to say, he hath brought forth in his own mind, so as to remember, his covenant that he made (cf. Ps. cv. 8—15; cxi., etc.). It is ever declared to be on the ground of this covenant that God dealt well with his people. Now, that covenant had been, as it were, put out of the Divine mind by the multitude of their sins. But now he brings it forth again. 4. *The Lord hath vindicated us.* The enemies of the Lord blasphemed his people. Counted them as having no worth or goodness at all; as far inferior to all others. But, despised as his people were and condemned, now, by God's redemption of them, he was to bring forth their righteousness, vindicate them, on and before all (cf. Ps. xxxvii. 5—7). This, which he did for Israel, he will do for all his people—"will bring forth their righteousness as the light, and their judgment as the noonday."

II. WHAT, THEREFORE, SHOULD WE DO? "Come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord our God." This is what we are to do. 1. *Why should we do this?* For the honour of God. It is his due. For our own soul's sake; to keep silence on what he has done for us is not only dishonouring to him, but disastrous to our own souls. For the encouragement of others, that they may be led to trust in him. 2. *How should we do this?* Openly: "Let us *declare* in Zion," etc. Not concealing our obligation, not refusing to confess him. Unitedly: "Come, and let *us*," etc. Join with them of a like mind. Heartily: calling on others to do the like, "Come," etc. In his Church: "In Zion." There taking our place, falling into rank in the army of the Lord. In the heavenly Zion the redeemed of the Lord never tire of thus declaring the work of the Lord.—C.

Ver. 19.—"*The Portion of Jacob*" (cf. homily, vol. i. p. 277).—C.

Ver. 20.—*The Church God's battle-axe.* God ever employs instruments to accomplish his purposes. He is a God that "hideth" himself. Hence many see nothing but instruments, and forget, or deny, the hand that uses them. "That does not seem much of a sword," said one, as he looked upon the treasured weapon of a great national hero and valiant soldier. "Ah! but you do not see the hand that wielded it," was the just reply. So as we look on the agencies God employs, how feeble they seem to be! But think of the force behind them, and then the works they accomplished are explained. Now, this is true of all God's works. Especially is it true in all the great spiritual achievements which we have heard of or seen. This verse refers to Israel, in reference to the idolatrous nations around them, and to Babylon especially. Israel was the unseen cause that led to the overthrow and destruction of one nation after another. For the Church's sake God governs the world. "All things are yours." Now, note—

I. THE WITNESS OF HISTORY to the truth that God's people are his "battle-axe and weapons of war." "I came not to send peace upon earth, but a sword," said Jesus, and in the same sense as this verse declares that word is true. "Magna est veritas, et prevalebit," is another rendering of the same fact. 1. *Before the birth of Christ* the pure

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monotheistic faith of Israel had, after their captivity, begun its iconoclastic work. Over large portions of the then civilized world that faith began to permeate and cleave its way. So that the old idolatries were in many places stricken with a mortal blow before even he was proclaimed who was to draw all men unto him. 2. *The downfall of paganism.* Notwithstanding the many accretions of error and superstition with which the pure faith of Christ so soon became encumbered, there yet remained inherent in it and inseparable from it such vital and mighty energy that it smote as with a "battle-axe" one falsehood after another, until they were well-nigh all slain. The forces against her in that ancient world were simply tremendous, but the Church went forth conquering and to conquer. In vain the scorn of the great, the fires of awful persecution, the power of venerable superstition; in vain the hindrances which she herself put in her own way; the Church was still God's destroying power against the false religions of that age, until at length the last emperor of Rome who endeavoured to revive paganism, Julian—whom a corrupt hierarchy malignantly branded as "the apostate," though, in fact, he was less apostate than themselves—confessed with his dying breath, "O Galilæan, thou hast conquered!" In all that long and heart-stirring conflict this declaration of the prophet was illustrated again and again. 3. *In the Reformation.* Not alone in those nations in which the Reformation principles took root, but in the Church of Rome herself, was the error and evil destroying power of the truth that dwelt in the hearts of God's people made manifest. See in such a book as Ranke's 'History of the Popes' what vast difference and improvements were brought about in the Catholic Church itself by the awful discipline through which she had then to pass. Whatever stern censures may have to be passed on that Church since the days of the Reformation—and they are neither few nor light—yet candour must admit that they are far fewer and far lighter than those which the outraged conscience of Christendom heaped upon her in the generations before. 4. *In all missionary and evangelistic triumphs over heathendom.*

II. THE WITNESS OF INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE. We are wont to speak of the truth of God as "mighty to the pulling down of the strongholds of sin and Satan." This is a Christian commonplace. And is it not true? What but this battle-axe slew the giant sins that ruled and oppressed in each soul?

III. THE SECRET OF THIS FORCE. What makes the Church God's battle-axe? We answer: 1. *The truth that sustains her.* The truth concerning God and our relations to him—he our Father and we all his children. 2. *The spirit that animates her;* not one of hate or disregard to man, as was common before Christ came, but love—love even towards the vilest for Christ's sake. 3. *The rule that regulates her.* The heathen looked on with amazement at the blamelessness of life and the sanctity of character which the faith of the Church produced, and they felt and owned its power. 4. *The love that constrains her.* She ever "bore about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus," and, mindful of that, she shrank from no suffering and refused no service. 5. *The hope that cheers her.* She wrought, not for a corruptible crown, but an incorruptible; and the hope, "that blessed hope," of her Lord's appearing to receive and reward his people, cheered them on amid the awful sufferings which they were called on to bear. And still it is in proportion as these mighty motives animate the Church in the individual soul that faithful and effectual service is done for Christ against the many and mighty adversaries of God with which the world abounds.—C.

Ver. 25.—*A fatal fact.* "Behold, I am against thee."

I. ITS TRUTH CONFESSED. When Jerusalem was taken the captain of Nebuchadnezzar's army avowed that what had happened was of God (cf. ch. xl. 2). So afterwards when, by the Roman army, Jerusalem was again captured, as our Lord foretold it would be, then too we have it on record that a like avowal was made by the leader of the Roman armies. And so here in regard to Babylon, no other conclusion could be come to. So vast was the power of Babylon that only the Divine opposition could explain the calamities that came upon her. And so when we see nations, Churches, men, that have every worldly advantage nevertheless brought low, as Rome was by the Goths, we can account for it only by this fact—"I am against thee."

II. ITS FATALITY SHOWN. If empires like Babylon cannot stand when God is against them, who else can stand? "If these things be done in the green tree, what shall be

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done in the dry?" If the mightiest fall beneath the Divine opposition, who of lesser power can hope to endure? "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." He is sure to if these do.

III. ITS CONCLUSION EVIDENT. Send an embassage and seek conditions of peace (Luke xiv. 31). "Be ye reconciled unto God." "Acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace."—C.

Ver. 33.—*Harvests of horror and threshings of wrath.* The Bible continually makes use of the similitude of the harvest and its labours, but it is only by its qualifying words that we can know what kind of harvest is meant. Here we have the frequent metaphor, but it tells of no joy, of sorrow only. *Similar language has been used of Israel* as is here used of Babylon (cf. Isa. xxi. 10; xli. 15). Israel's sins had been the seed of that harvest, and it was a terrible one. All the sorrows of the invasion and destruction of their beloved land and city, their holy city, Jerusalem, and all those which were associated with and sprang out of their bitter exile in Babylon, were but parts of that harvest and strokes of "the bruising flails of God's corrections." *But here it is Babylon that is spoken of* (cf. Isa. xxi. for a yet earlier prediction of Babylon's fall). She had sown the seed; the cup of her iniquity was full ere the harvests and threshings told of here came upon her. "Dissolute and luxurious in their habits, the Babylonians hid under their soft luxurious exterior a fierceness, an insatiable lust for blood, such as marked many Eastern tribes—such, for instance, as we ourselves have found in 'the mild Hindoo.' The Hebrew prophets describe them as 'a bitter and hasty,' a 'terrible and dreadful' people, 'fiercer than the evening wolves,' a people who 'made the earth tremble and did shake kingdoms.'" They conquered well-nigh all the kingdoms of the then known world; they pillaged every country they conquered, and often went far to depopulate the countries they pillaged. In Judæa, for instance, the land became a mere haunt of wild beasts after the Babylonians had subdued it, and from Jerusalem they pillaged even the sacred vessels of the temple. Hence to Isaiah they appeared as "the spoiler spoiling, and the destroyer destroying." And besides all this, there seems to have been an inherent and ineradicable wickedness in the nation itself, or it could hardly have been selected, as it is, as the type of all that is abominable and hateful in the sight of God. For many a generation and century she had been spared. From the beginning to the end of the Bible we read of her. In her decayed greatness there was a little Christian Church there, of which St. Peter tells (1 Pet. v. 19). But up to the time of the Exile, and during far the greater portion of it, Babylon seemed only to advance in splendour, in wealth, and power. But at length the time of her harvest—an awful time, indeed—came, and in the sorrows connected with her capture and overthrow, and in the hard and hated rule of her Persian lords, there was the "threshing" of which both Isaiah and Jeremiah tell. The contemplation of it filled the Prophet Isaiah with an unspeakable horror: "My loins are filled with pain: pangs have taken hold on me" (Isa. xxi. 3, 4). Jew as he was, he could not behold the dread vision of what was to come on Babylon without deep anguish. She "must have filled in his thoughts much the place which Rome held in the mind of a cultivated Spaniard or Carthaginian of the early Christian centuries. To him the Medes and Persians, plunging down from their unknown, mysterious mountain fastnesses upon the wealthy Babylonian plain, must have seemed much as the Goths and Vandals seemed to the more civilized races of Europe, when they came pouring down the Alps, to carry sword and fire through the storied plains of Italy. The whole Christian world shuddered when Rome fell; and as her fall to the modern so was the fall of Babylon to the ancient world." Harvest and threshing: these images of the barn commonly suggest that which is peaceful and joyous; but here they tell of the reverse of that—of horror and woe unspeakable. Learn, therefore—

I. SINS ARE SEEDS WHICH MAY HAVE A LATE, BUT SHALL SURELY HAVE A LARGE AND TERRIBLE, HARVEST.

II. RELUCTANT AS GOD MAY BE TO AFFLICT THE CHILDREN OF MEN, HE WILL NOT SPARE A SINGLE STROKE SO LONG AS THEY CLING TO THE EVILS WHICH DEGRADE AND DESTROY THEM.

III. THE JUDGMENTS AND PUNISHMENTS OF GOD ARE NOT VINDICTIVE AND FINAL, BUT THE "THRESHINGS OF THE CORN OF HIS FLOOR," (Isa. xxi. 10). The separation, that is,

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of the evil from the good, the worthless from that which is precious and shall be preserved for evermore.—C.

Ver. 48.—*Joy over judgment.* I. THE SINNER WILL WEEP AND WAIL. This is the constant declaration of the Word of God. "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Would that the sinner would look steadily on to the end, and so consider his ways!

II. HUMAN NATURE, IN SYMPATHY WITH THE SINNER'S WOES, WILL SORROW. (Cf. Isa. xxi. 10.) We have need to be on our guard against this. In the present day our sympathy with the suffering leads us to forget the causes and the blessed results that come from the judgment of God. No criminal is ever condemned to die but at once there are those who strive to get his punishment remitted. It is a false sympathy and needs to be resisted.

III. BUT HEAVEN AND EARTH REJOICE. Cf. the many psalms in which we are called on to rejoice because the Lord "cometh to judge the earth." The grounds of this joy are: 1. Righteousness is vindicated. 2. The oppressed are delivered. 3. Men will learn righteousness. 4. They that are judged will be brought to a better mind. 5. The kingdom of God will more speedily come.—C.

Ver. 50.—*The charge to them that are spared.* This charge, addressed to Israelites spared from Babylon, may be applied to all in Christ. For—

I. ALL IN CHRIST ARE SPARED ONES. Spared from: 1. The condemnation due to sin. 2. The abiding tyranny of sin. 3. The crushing power of sorrow. 4. The misery of alienation from God. 5. The might of death.

II. TO SUCH THIS THREEFOLD CHARGE IS ADDRESSED. 1. *They are to "go away, stand not still."* As Israel from Babylon that had enslaved them, so these from the sins which God has forgiven them. "Let him that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." Many Jews despised this charge, and stayed on in Babylon. Some not merely stayed in Babylon as Jews, but probably far more of them were "mingled with the heathen, and learned their ways." "Evil communications corrupt good manners." Even those who disobeyed only the letter of the command suffered, whilst those who disobeyed both the letter and the spirit were simply lost, cut off from the house of Israel. *And they who have received Christ*, if they do not break away from their old sins and from all that would hold them in bondage to such sins, will lose their religion and are in sore peril of apostatizing from Christ. Therefore let such put further and further distance between themselves and their former life, lest again they be entangled and overcome. 2. *To "remember the Lord afar off."* In their sin and misery God seemed afar off to Israel. "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God"—such was their grievous lament. But they were to remember him, turn their thoughts and prayers toward him, and believingly wait his promised answer. And to the believer now "it doth not yet appear what we shall be;" we are far off from that; but we are to remember the Lord, though we be yet in condition and character so far off from him. Remember him in our meditations, prayers, purposes, and aims; *wait* on him, and so renew our strength. 3. "*Let Jerusalem come into your mind.*" How blessed to be there! how she demands our earnest service!—her joys, her sanctity, her children, her employ; our place there prepared for us, and our preparation for the place. So remember her, and so be delivered from being wearied and faint in our minds.—C.

Ver. 58.—"*The broad walls.*" I. THE EMPIRE OF SIN HAS SUCH WALLS. Those referred to here may be taken as a type of them. They were: 1. *To separate.* Have we not proof of this in the wide distance, the invincible barriers, which keep the ungodly from sympathizing, associating, or in any way uniting, with the people of God? The kingdom of evil remains shut up from the kingdom of God. Mansoul cannot be entered by way of the gates; the messengers of the King seek admission, but cannot obtain it. And hereafter the separation will continue (cf. Luke xvi., "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed"). Separation, which is voluntary now, becomes involuntary then. 2. *For security.* A terrible security it is. In vain do the ambassadors of God endeavour to penetrate within those walls. In vain do his soldiers seek

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to scale them and his weapons of war to destroy them. The strong man armed keepeth his goods in peace. What minister of Christ has not again and again retired baffled from before these broad walls, so high, so strong, so impregnable? 3. *For enjoyment.* The broad walls of cities such as Babylon were places for pleasant walking for recreation and enjoyment. So does the sinner's fancied security lull his soul to rest, make him cry, "Peace, peace!" when there is no peace. But—

II. THE KINGDOM OF GOD HAS ITS BROAD WALLS. (Cf. Neh. iii. 8, where we read of the broad walls of Jerusalem.) Let us see to it that we maintain and preserve those walls. 1. *For separation.* Let us not seek to come close to the world, in its habits, maxims, spirit, behaviour. Keep the wall broad, strong, high. We cannot serve God *and* mammon. Let there bo no attempt at compromise. And these walls are also 2. *For security.* If we do not maintain them we run great risk for ourselves. Tampering with sin is perilous work. And let us not think that we are more likely to win the world by such breaking down of the broad walls. The result is all the other way. See how broad a wall Christ maintained between himself and the world. God has built these walls. His power, his wisdom, his love, his promise, are all portions of these walls by which his Church is guarded and against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. 3. *For enjoyment.* What comfort there is in the thought of them, of the sure defence, the wall of fire, which God will be to his people! And on these walls, as we "walk about Zion, and go round her, and tell the towers thereof," what rest, what communion one with another, and what bright prospects are ours! The broad walls of Babylon shall be "broken down;" but these are eternal. Are we within them?—C.

Ver. 64.—*The weariness of sin.* "They shall be weary." With these sad words the Prophet Jeremiah closes his book. The shadows are over it all, nor are they in the least lifted where we most love to see them lifted—at the end. They are spoken of the inhabitants of Babylon, and repeat what was said in ver. 58. They suggest the theme—*The weariness of sin.*

I. WEARINESS IS ALWAYS PAIN. It may be of *the body*, and then exhaustion and fatigue render exertion any longer only so much torture. Or of *the mind.* The brain becomes dazed, bewildered, incapable of effort. Or of *the heart*—that which is caused by disappointment, ingratitude, unfulfilled desire, hopelessness. Or that *of the soul*, which is the weariness told of here. But in all cases it is full of pain.

II. WEARINESS IS A UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE. The child of God is often weary. Such are exhorted not to be "weary in well-doing," the exhortation implying the more than possibility of such weariness being experienced. And our Saviour knew this weariness—never of, but often in, his work. In a world like this there are causes enough for such weariness to lay hold on the servants of God. But if they know weariness, yet more do the children of this world; for—

III. THE WORST WEARINESS IS THAT OF SIN. For a while the enjoyment which springs from sin may so intoxicate and dazzle the wrong-doer that he will laugh at the idea of weariness, and declare that his is the alone path of pleasure and good. But after a while that ceases, and then comes satiety and weariness. 1. *The causes* of this are: (1) *Negative.* In serving sin we have not those great aids to endurance and restoration of strength which are ever present to the child of God. The servant of sin has no high and noble motive, no worthy motive at all, in what he does. The motives of affection, of duty, of gratitude, of love, which sustain so mightily the mind of the Christian,—these are all lacking in the servant of sin. *Good hope* also cheers the child of God; but what harvest can the sinner expect to reap? It is such as he dares not, and therefore will not, contemplate. *The communion of the Spirit of God*—that Spirit who "giveth songs in the night," is present to the Christian, and in the deepest distress enables him to rejoice. But nought of this can the ungodly know in their hard work and service. *Drawing near to God* is another aid of the child of God. For—

"We may kneel and cast our load,
E'en while we pray, upon our God,
Then rise with lightened cheer;
Sure that the Father, who is nigh
To hear the famished ravens cry,
Will hear in that we fear."

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This most real help the ungodly never know. (2) *But there are positive causes of weariness* in the service of sin. Jesus said, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." His cup of woe was bitter, but theirs would be more bitter still. Now, the positive causes of the weariness of sin are such as these. The powerlessness of sin to minister pleasure continually. The goadings of conscience, which will not be silent. God's judgments—so full of pain, so inevitable, so irremediable, as these on Babylon. The hopelessness of sin's outlook—nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment. 2. *The effects* of this weariness are seen in such as Saul and Judas, and in the myriad others who have sought, in self-destruction or by wild plunging into yet deeper sins, to escape that weariness which tracks their footsteps continually. Well might Paul ask, "What profit had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?" Who would begin a career that ends in such a way? What an argument such facts furnish for seeking, if haply we may find it: 3. *The cure* of all such weariness! The child of God knows it well. The ungodly may know it too if they will. It consists in submission to that Lord who says to all such, "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden," etc. There alone is the cure.—C.

Ver. 5.—*Unforsaken Israel.* I. AN APPARENT FORSAKING. Israel looked forsaken. It was in exile, in captivity, and under the asserted judgment of Jehovah. We have always, to a certain extent, to accept the appearances of things. God's presence had been manifested in outward favour and prosperity, and what was more plausible than to say that the withdrawing of the favour and prosperity meant the withdrawing of God himself? But then it is forgotten that God's presence may be manifested in many ways. Outward prosperity is not essential to signify God's satisfaction with us. Nor must we infer that, because a backsliding Christian has fallen into trouble and misery, therefore God has forsaken him. The signs of man forsaking God are made very clear, so that there may be all possible incentives to repentance; but if God ever does forsake a man, leaving him utterly to his own folly and recklessness, no sign of it is given to us. There is quite enough already in our own wild fancies to make us desponding and despairing.

II. A PLAUSIBLE CAUSE FOR FORSAKING. The land of Israel was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel. Men think of God as they do of themselves. The patience of the human master soon gets exhausted with the servant who disobeys many commandments and obeys others in the most perfunctory way.

III. A REAL CAUSE FOR CLOSE ADHERENCE. That Israel, chosen and beloved of God, fills his land with sin, so far from being a reason for forsaking, is a reason for closer adherence than ever. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep in safety and goes into the wilderness after the lost one. If only men, brought at last to a sense of their wickedness and recklessness, could see how near God is to them, how ready and able to help, they would be filled with hope. "God is love," and therefore the greater our need the greater his nearness. The real difficulty is that we flee to the succours and solaces of self, and so the nearness of God, with all his suitable and ample supplies, is only too easily obscured.

IV. A FRESH MANIFESTATION OF THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL. Never does God's holiness so appear as when he is dealing with sinners in the way of long-suffering, if perchance they will surrender at last and permit him to restore them to righteousness and peace. Surely God's holiness shines most in his greatest attribute, and that is love. God is marked off from all created things by his power and his righteousness, but most of all by his transcendent love. Here is the most glorious aspect of his holiness, that, no matter how much men may sin against him, neglect his will, and abuse his world, yet, when they are ready to turn, he is close at hand with everything prepared to receive them.—Y.

Ver. 6.—*Individual escape.* Two whole chapters are taken up in enforcing the inevitable doom on Babylon. The city as a whole cannot possibly escape; therefore so much the more necessary is it to point out escape for the individual and put hope into his heart. Observe—

I. HOW THIS EXHORTATION TO THE INDIVIDUAL SETS BEFORE US CLEARLY THE GENERAL DOOM. All who stay in heedlessness and unbelief must perish. Particular

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inhabitants of Babylon have not to sin some special sin in order to bring destruction on themselves. All they have to do is just to go on in their buying, selling, and getting gain. So the natural man everywhere has just to go on within the common worldly limits and according to the common worldly traditions. Going on quietly accepting the position of the unregenerate, he will assuredly come to the end of such. "Out of Christ we *may* perish" is not the word to be said, but "Out of Christ we must perish."

II. GOD'S CONSTANT CONSIDERATION FOR THE INDIVIDUAL. Masses of men have to suffer because the great bulk of them will ever be heedless of the signs of danger. But every wise, foreseeing individual, in whose heart there are steady inclinings to the right, may escape. Certainly we cannot escape always involvement in temporal calamities. It might even be cowardly and selfish to run away from them. To run away from a temporal calamity might be the very way to bring on ourselves the severest spiritual calamity. But with respect to spiritual perils, in comparison with which temporal perils are mere trifles, every individual has his chance. He must have individuality of character in this matter, ability to see danger when others see none, and courage to flee when others stand still and laugh at him. Recollect that there may be flight in one sense, while in another sense things remain unchanged. We may remain in a community, and yet flee from all danger by avoiding its follies and its disobedience to God.

III. THE NEED OF PROMPTITUDE AND DECISION. Not specified, promptitude is yet evidently implied. Flee at once; for if you wait until you can see danger, it may be too late.—Y.

Ver. 10.—*Declaring in Zion the work of the Lord.* I. THAT WHICH HAS TO BE DECLARED. The work of Jehovah, the God of Israel, that work being the bringing forth of what is described as "our righteousness." What, then, was this righteousness? We can only conjecture, but probably it was that righteousness, ever well-pleasing to God, shown by those who believe in his promises and obey his directions. There was ample field for righteousness of this kind on the part of the Israelites in captivity; for had not God told them expressly, however unlikely the event might appear, that they would yet return to their former dwelling-place? In due time there was to be a vindication of their faith. But out of that faith there is to be kept every element of self-glorification. It is man's blessedness, but not his praise, that he recognizes the certainty of what a promise-keeping, omnipotent One will do for him. Declaring the work of God is always a satisfactory thing, for the work of God itself is always satisfactory. Well-begun, thorough, completed, necessary work it is.

II. THOSE WHO DECLARE IT. Those who are the materials of the work and for whom the work is done. They are not mere bystanders and spectators. The sign that real Divine work is being done in a human heart comes when praise and acknowledgment of the great Worker is expressed. We are God's workmanship. It is he who extricates us from our confusions, nullifies the vain doings of the merely natural man, and makes us capable of actions that will abide and glorify him. It is part of God's very work to put into us the spirit of declaration, so that we perceive the change wrought in us, the Worker of it, the continuity of it, in short, all the good connected with it. And perceiving all this, how should we do other than declare in one mingled utterance the glory of God and our gratitude to him?

III. THE PLACE OF DECLARATION. In Zion, with its memories of Jehovah's presence in the past. Zion was a name to humble Israel, in the thought of former apostasy and idolatry; but Zion was nothing but glorious so far as Jehovah was concerned. Zion had been too long neglected, not indeed so far as a certain outward worship was concerned, but the worship of the heart was lacking. Now Zion would appear in an altogether new aspect. Instead of mere words, mere ritual routine, there was an acknowledgment of deeply felt benefit at the hands of God. The place of worship was the same, yet not the same, for the old scene had new associations. We may acknowledge God anywhere; we must acknowledge him everywhere; but yet there is a suitability in making certain acknowledgments in certain places. What could be more appropriate than to utter forth words of true spiritual recognition on that sacred spot where God had been so long misunderstood and defied?—Y.

Ver. 13.—*The dweller on many waters.* I. THE RECOGNITION OF NATURAL RESOURCES.

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The great natural advantages of Babylon are allowed to the fullest extent. She stands on "the great river Euphrates." A great river for navigable purposes means prosperity to a city. There is also to be considered the facility of getting water for all the other purposes of life. The abundance of Babylon's treasures was in part a result of her dwelling on many waters. The waters helped to set off the magnificence and splendour of her buildings. Nothing is gained by minimizing the treasures of this world. Let them be displayed and acknowledged to their fullest extent (see Rev. xviii.).

II. THESE RESOURCES CANNOT AVERT DOOM. The fact is that the abundance of these resources can only manifest itself in certain directions. There is abundance of that which ministers to carnal ambition and lust, abundance of that which feeds the pride of individuals and nations, abundance of that which gives merely human security against merely human attack. But when we come to consider the highest satisfactions and the greatest dangers, then we find scantiness instead of abundance. The many waters dry up into a shallow pool here and there. The characteristic of the abundance given by Christ is that it avails for all possible needs. Never can it be said to the Christian, livingly connected as he is with his heavenly treasures, that his end is come. Of his treasure, his blessedness, and his security, there shall be no end.

III. AN INDICATION OF WHAT MADE THESE RESOURCES SO DECEITFUL. They were, largely at least, the accumulations of covetousness. We must not look too closely at the magnificent houses of a great city, with their contents, or else we shall be speedily undeceived as to their real glory. We shall see how much greed and unjust gain and the grinding of the poor had to do with such buildings. Grand buildings for some men to live in can have no charm to the Christian eye, if a necessary condition for their existence is that many others should live in ruinous hovels. The just and loving God must look on splendid cities with a very different eye from the human one. And doing so, he must of necessity fix a limit to covetousness. Covetousness goes on adding to its treasures, until at last it excites the covetousness of others. And even apart from this, outward treasures, unduly esteemed, must in time corrupt the inward man.—Y.

Ver. 15.—*The resources of Jehovah.* Here are the resources of Jehovah as over against the resources of Babylon. Note the differences between them.

I. THEY ARE RESOURCES IN JEHOVAH HIMSELF. It is from the very being of Jehovah that his works flow forth, whether those works be considered as illustrating his power, his wisdom, or his understanding. When a prophet of Jehovah has to speak of human resources, he speaks of things outside the man. Apart from the soil on which he stands, the world in which he lives, what can man do? His very body is derived from the soil, and to the soil returns. His chosen treasures, the things on which he leans, are treasures upon earth. But when a prophet comes to speak of Jehovah, he can think of him separated from all the visible and tangible. He does not depend on these things, for they would have had no existence but for him. We may, in a certain qualified sense, speak of human power, wisdom, and understanding; we must indeed use such terms, for some men are so weak that others must be spoken of as powerful, some so foolish that others must be spoken of as wise, some so shallow and ignorant that others must be spoken of as men of understanding. But the very power of a man reveals in time his essential weakness, his very wisdom his essential folly, his very understanding his essential ignorance. God alone is power, and in him is no weakness at all; God alone is wisdom, and in him no folly at all; God alone is understanding, and in him nothing of the limited and erroneous knowledge which is so often a humiliation to human pride.

II. THEY ARE RESOURCES UNITED IN ONE BEING. Judged according to human standards, some men are powerful, some men wise, and some are men of understanding; but very seldom, even according to the human standard, are all three qualities united in one man; and it is not very often that even two of them are found. Man may have power, mere muscular strength, the power of the athlete, the power of the ox, without anything worthy the name of wisdom. So there may be wisdom without power; and there may be a very high degree of wisdom apart from large knowledge or a powerful understanding. Men are made so that what is defective in one may be supplied by another. The greatest human works are done when the power of one is joined with the

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wisdom of a second and the understanding of a third. But with Jehovah all these qualities, in their highest degree, are found united in One. The only account after all that man can give of the making of matter is that it has been made by a God. And then his wisdom has reduced everything to order, arranged the world in all its grades, organisms, and mutual connections. The natural man comes nearest to God when he can combine the power of one, the wisdom of another, and the understanding of yet a third, to make as it were one new man for the doing of special work; and the spiritual man comes nearest to God when, still preserving his individuality of action, he exchanges for his natural weakness the spiritual power of Christ, for his natural folly the spiritual wisdom of Christ, and for his often useless and deluding knowledge of the things of this world that knowledge which comes in the revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.—Y.

Ver. 19.—*The Portion of Jacob contrasted with the confidences of Babylon.* I. THE NAME BY WHICH JEHOVAH IS HERE INDICATED. The Portion of Jacob. So the psalmist says, "My flesh and my heart faileth . . . but God is my Portion for ever" (Ps. lxxiii. 26; see also Ps. xvi. 5). Men had their appointed portions, and no doubt they varied in value. But few were those who could rise above mere external things and look on the invisible God as their real Portion. And yet these were the only ones who had a portion and inheritance in the fullest sense of the words. For only so were they lifted above all temptation to envy, and above all the consequences of terrestrial impairments and losses. True, we have an inheritance of invisible and everlasting things, of which the present visible possessions give the preparatory conditions; but to possess these things we must possess God, must be sure of his interest, his spiritual providence, his sufficiency, for only in him can even spiritual possessions have their beginning and continuance. Nor must we fail to note what may be called the mutual character of this portion and inheritance. Jehovah being the Portion of Jacob, it is equally true that Jehovah's portion is his people (Deut. xxxii. 9). Even the best possessions of a natural man are not mere legal property, not mere intellectual knowledge, but those human beings whom he can call friends. Such a one is rich according to the quality of his friends, those on whom he has claims and who have claims on him. He is rich according to the opportunities he has of getting service from them; richer still according to his opportunities for rendering service, on the principle that it is more blessed to give than to receive. And so God will be our Inheritance just in proportion as we are God's inheritance. We cannot get satisfaction out of God unless he is getting satisfaction out of us. Our faith, our obedience, our devotion, are the conditions of his peculiar and richest bounty.

II. THE CONTRAST OF JACOB'S PORTION WITH THE PORTION OF OTHERS. They inherit a barren land. It may look promising; it may yield the appearance of fruit; but real and abiding fruit there is none. Babylon has taken Bel for its portion, and now the portion and the possessors are alike turned to confusion. Indeed, the portion has vanished into nothingness; for never was it anything but a name, an imposing fiction, a proof both of man's need of a portion and how incompetent he is to make such a portion for himself. But Jehovah always remains a Portion. The typical Jacob, the typical people of God that is, were unable to keep Jehovah as their Portion; they never had any real grasp of him, never more than the merest external acquaintance. But for those who can lay hold of him he is surely a Portion still.—Y.

Vers. 25, 26.—*The destroying mountain destroyed.* I. THE DESTROYING MOUNTAIN. The mountain is a very fitting symbol of a people eminent among the nations and seeming easily to dominate over them. In such a symbol there is involved the undisputed assertion of superiority. The mountain looks down on the plains, and the plains accept the position. But whereas, in nature, the mountain looks down upon the plains with a mingling of benefits and injuries, of which even the injuries are seen to be benefits when looked at more closely, here we have a destroying mountain spoken of—a mountain that destroys the whole earth. God is against Babylon, not merely for the hurt it has inflicted on his own people, but because destruction is the very element in which it lives. Wheresoever Babylon came it brought spoliation, enslavement, and misery. Men and nations are made eminent that, like the mountains in the natural

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world, they may communicate good everywhere. But if they form destroying purposes then their very eminence increases their destroying power. The mountain that by its very elevation helps to distribute pleasant and profitable waters over the face of the earth, when turned to a volcano is just as well placed for sending down the lava-torrents.

II. ITS UTTER DESTRUCTION. That which must be considered first of all is the safety of the whole earth. It is God's way to uproot all that menaces the security and peace of his universe. To impair and enfeeble is not enough; the evil thing must be destroyed. And this is possible because it is God who is against it. He can destroy and obliterate where men would not for a moment dream of such a possibility. Did not Jesus tell his disciples that great mountains could be plucked up and cast into the sea, great obstacles and great menaces to Christian progress be utterly removed? And here the prophet signifies the completeness of the destruction by asserting that Babylon shall become as a mountain reduced as it were to mere ashes. To that mountain men have been in the habit of resorting to find corner-stones and foundation-stones, but such is their resort no longer. There is complete destruction of the enemies of God's people, and of course this implies complete safety of God's people themselves. (For a corresponding metaphor, see Isa. xxx. 14.)—Y.

Ver. 30.—*Effeminacy.* Doubtless in this utterance there is something of the then customary scorn with respect to women. But this must not make us forget that one of the worst things to be said of a man is that he has become as a woman, just as one of the worst things to be said of a woman is that she has become as a man.

I. THIS UTTERANCE DOES NOT REPROACH THE WOMAN, BUT THE MAN. Woman has her natural limitations. Her usual place is not in the battle-field or on the walls of the attacked city. An army of women against an army of men would be an unnatural, a revolting spectacle. But this very difference between the proper place of women and the proper place of men intensifies the reproach against a man when it can truly be said of him that he has become as a woman. Those qualities which in a woman are womanly in a man are only effeminate.

II. THE CORRESPONDING POSSIBLE REPROACH UPON WOMEN. A woman must not allow it to be said of her that she has become as a man. She must never forget the limitations and duties of her sex. Yet on the other hand, she must not be too ready to accept common opinion in interpreting those limitations and duties.

III. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN IT MAY BE THE GREATEST HONOUR TO A MAN TO BECOME AS A WOMAN. There are times when the strength of the man, without being lost, becomes unnoticed because of the presence of a woman-like tenderness. And of course there is the corresponding truth that woman may be honoured in becoming as the man, else where would be the fame of Joan of Arc and the Maid of Saragossa? Both men and women alike must have the courage to face mere external reproaches. Nothing is easier than to taunt a man with being unmanly and a woman with being unwomanly, but if only men and women alike persevere in what they feel to be right, they will in due time escape from the region of baseless taunts. After all, the humanity common to men and women alike is greater than peculiarities of sex. In Jesus Christ there is neither male nor female.—Y.

Ver. 36.—*Making the springs dry.* I. MAN'S EFFORT TO SUPPLY HIS NEED. There are the springs breaking forth among the hills and inviting men freely to use them. But there are also the wells men dig for themselves. Men must have water, yet they cannot always go and live by the natural springs, and so where they have to live they dig wells, and wonderfully do they succeed oftentimes in getting what they want. Water comes apparently in exhaustless abundance. Thus it is with the natural resources which man strives to obtain for himself. They open out before him far larger than any present wants. And thus when man sees all this within his reach, he naturally devises great undertakings on the strength of such great resources.

II. THE SELFISH USE OF HIS SUCCESS. It not unfrequently happens that the man who digs a well for himself does it at the expense of others, making their wells to run dry. The thing may be done unintentionally, or almost on a commonly accepted principle of every one looking out for himself; still it is to be looked on as pure selfishness. The resources of Babylon were increased by diminishing the resources of other peoples.

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This is a point to be always looked at in estimating men of large resources, namely, how far those resources have been gained by leaving others without resource at all or with but a scanty one.

III. GOD'S REMOVAL OF HIS RESOURCES. "I will make her springs dry." God can dry up all humanly provided wells. We must not boast ourselves of their number, their depth, or the ease with which they keep to a certain level in spite of all drains upon them. Powerful nations, proud of their history and their achievements, need to remember this Divine interference. Men, looking back on a long course of individual success, need to remember the same. One can imagine a city in a time of siege, thoroughly provisioned, knowing exactly how much it had for food, and not troubling itself at all about drink, seeing that it had a deep well, the waters of which showed hardly any difference even in the driest summer. Yet all at once that well may fail, and, however large the other supplies, thirst will compel surrender. God dries up all wells that have been dug in covetousness and injustice.

IV. THE IMPLICATION OF OTHER ENDURING RESOURCES. "With thee is the fountain of life," says the psalmist (Ps. xxxvi. 9). We must look, not to the wells of our own digging, but to the springs from the everlasting hills. Especially we must catch the spirit of Ps. lxxxvii. There the psalmist praises Zion, and finishes up by saying, "All my springs are in thee." Let our springs be in the holy and abiding mount of God (Heb. xii. 22).—Y.

Ver. 50.—*A timely recollection and its practical effect.* Jehovah is making his severest judgments to fall on Babylon. How severe they are is indicated by the fact that two long chapters are occupied with denunciations upon her. But all the time Israel is in her midst. Israelites are domiciled and settled down. How far they lived by themselves and how far they mingled with their captors we cannot tell. One thing, however, we are sure of, that in the midst of so much destruction to Babylon they, or at least the bulk of them, were preserved. It must have been a very discomposing time for them, even though they had tolerable confidence that all would turn out right. There may be real safety where as yet there is not clear perception of it, and therefore no possibility of untroubled peace. But at last the danger is over, and what will the Israelite do then? He may elect, for reasons personal to himself, to stay in Babylon. He may be tempted to forget his duty as a part in a greater whole. Not for himself, however, not to further any aims of his own, was he thus preserved. He has escaped the sword only that he may the better serve God. Present ease, pleasant associations, may rise attractively in his mind. Not, of course, that these could be found in desolated Babylon, but they might surely be found somewhere else than in Jerusalem so far away. Against natural thoughts of this kind the prophet's word comes in here as a guard. It is a word for those Israelites living in Babylon at the time of Babylon's downfall. The things near to them, which their eyes see and their hands handle, are the least important. The really important considerations are those which may most easily be forgotten. Thus, so to speak, they must be pushed before the mind. Every right-hearted Israelite would keep the God and the city of his fathers in his heart. And so we should keep Jehovah and Jerusalem in mind. The greatest duties and hopes of our life come from our connection with such recollections.—Y.

Ver. 60.—*Evil written in a book.* I. THE FACT THAT EVIL IS WRITTEN AS WELL AS SPOKEN. The evils that Jehovah denounced against Babylon were such as could be written in a book, because the denunciations were not those of selfish and hasty passion, but expressed the calm wrath of a righteous God. The judgment on Babylon arose from the necessity of the position. A righteous God could not have acted otherwise. What a difference between his words in anger and our words! If all our angry, hasty, petulant words were perforce written in a book, what a record of shame there would be! Such a consequence of their utterance might make us a little more cautious, but still the words would come at times. If we are to understand what it is to be really angry and sin not, we must look at the deliberate records of Jehovah's wrath in the Scriptures. We are glad that *our* angry words should be forgotten; God, so to speak, takes trouble that his words should be remembered.

II. THE NECESSITY THAT THESE WORDS SHOULD BE WRITTEN. It is not enough

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that the words might be written—there had to be a reason for the writing. This is found in the necessity for doing all that could be done by way of warning and preparation. What was written could be shown first to one and then another. There was a necessity that even people of Babylon themselves should have ample opportunity to profit by the words spoken against their city. A necessity too in history. The fall of Babylon is a remarkable event in history, altogether outside of Scripture records, but the real secret of its fall is only to be known when we read such solemn and sustained predictions as are found in these two chapters.

III. GOD'S DENUNCIATIONS ARE NOT HIS ONLY WRITTEN WORDS. God has to write down his threatenings, but we are bound to remember that they are only a part—and how small a part they are!—of the total that he has caused to be written. How different he is in this respect from men! Their threatenings and angry words would sometimes fill a goodly volume, but their words of kindness and long-suffering, oh, how few are they! God's delight is to cause words of grace and promises of reward to be written.—Y.

Vers. 63, 64.—*A symbol of irretrievable loss.* It was fitting that the exhibition and record of a symbol such as this should close the long denunciation of Babylon. Where God determines to destroy no man can either avert or recover. This stone, perhaps, still lies at the bottom of Euphrates, and possibly even there may be something to signify the book once attached to it. We know not what relics of Old Testament times might yet be disentombed, what confirmations and revelations are still in actual existence.

I. GOD'S POWER OF UTTER DESTRUCTION. The impossibility of discovering this stone has to be considered relatively. Strictly speaking, it might perhaps have been recovered if it had been worth while. But for all practical purposes it was finally lost. Here is the difference between human destructions and the Divine destruction. Babylon is a wilderness still. Where God has chosen to make special marks of his wrath with the unrighteousness of men there rests a blight which no human effort can overcome; and generally speaking there is no disposition to overcome it. But where destruction comes simply through human passion and power there may be comparatively speedy recovery. This is a side of war on which we do well to reflect. Wars, with all their terrible accompaniments, may do something to get rid of some evils, and may thus be the condition of great good. Man cannot destroy where God wills to preserve. But where God destroys he destroys finally, and it is just this dreadful possibility of final ruin that should make men cautious in their estimate of the future, and prompt to turn from all evil and selfish paths.

II. THE CHEERING SIDE OF GOD'S UTTER DESTRUCTIONS. With God destruction always means salvation. Destruction is never for its own sake, never an arbitrary, aimless thing. All Divine destruction must be looked on as part of the process of salvation. Nations are scattered, human institutions overthrown, the temporal life of individuals ended, but the individual man in his abiding relations to God remains. This stone lost in one sense was not lost in another. Nay, it was serving a higher purpose than any it could have served simply as a stone. It became a teacher, and it is a teacher still. Abel, being dead, yet speaketh. And this stone from the bottom of Euphrates speaks still, warning all ambitious men and all neglecters of the commandments and predictions of Jehovah.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER LII.

The contents of this chapter prove that it is not an independent narrative, but the concluding part of a history of the kings of Judah. It agrees almost word for word with 2 Kings xxiv. 18—xxv. 30, from which we are justified in inferring that it is taken from the historical work which the editor of the Books of Kings closely followed. It is most improbable that Jeremiah was the author. Would the prophet have contented himself with the meagre statement that Zedekiah "did that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord" (ver. 2), or with such a summary description of the siege of Jerusalem? Apparently the editor who attached ch. lii. as an appendix to the

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Book of Jeremiah omitted the account of Gedaliah (preserved in 2 Kings xxv. 22—26) because a fuller narrative had been already given in ch. xl.—xlii. Apparently, too, either the same or some later editor inserted vers. 28—30 (not found in the Septuagint) from another source; the passage differs in several respects from 2 Kings xxiv. The text of ch. lii. seems to be a nearer approach to the original document than that of 2 Kings xxiv. 18—xxv. 30 (see Graf's commentary). Compare ch. xxxix.

Ver. 3.—**It came to pass.** The implied subject of the verb is Zedekiah's evil-doing. **That Zedekiah rebelled.** There ought to be a full stop before these words, and "that" should rather be "And."

Ver. 6.—**The famine was sore** (see the pathetic descriptions in Lam. i. 19, 20; ii. 11, 12, 20; iv. 9, 10).

Ver. 7.—**Broken up**; rather, *broken into.* **The plain.** The Hebrew has, "the Arâbah," the name constantly given to the chalky depression in the midst of which the Jordan ran.

Ver. 9.—**Gave judgment** (see on ch. i. 16).

Ver. 11.—**In prison**; literally, *in the house of custody.*

Ver. 22.—**All of brass**, etc.; rather, *all of brass: and like unto these had the second pillar, and pomegranates.*

Ver. 23.—**On a side**; rather, *towards the outside.*

Ver. 28.—**In the seventh year.** As Ewald and Keil agree, we should correct "seventh" into "seventeenth" (just as in 2 Chron. xxxvi. 9, for "eight" we should read "eighteen"). On the small number of Jews deported Ewald remarks, "Nothing so clearly shows the extent to which the best men from the upper classes had been already despatched by the Chaldeans across the Euphrates, as the fact that in all the years of the second, and, if it be insisted on, of the third revolt, put together, they found only 4600 men more whom they thought worth the trouble of transporting" ('History of Israel,' iv. 265). As to the third deportation, see on ch. xli. 1.

Ver. 31.—**Lifted up the head of Jehoiachin.** Ewald thinks that Jehoiachin was regarded by the Jews in exile as the legitimate king, and compares Lam. iv. 20; ii. 9.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 4—7.—*The siege and capture of Jerusalem.* I. GENERAL LESSONS OF THE SIEGE. 1. *God will perform his threats.* The capture of Jerusalem had been long and frequently predicted. The accumulated prophecies were now fulfilled. 2. *Delay of judgment is no reason for expecting it to be permanently withheld.* The fate of Jerusalem seemed to be long postponed. But at length it came. 3. *Previous immunity is no security for the future.* The Jews fondly idolized Jerusalem as a charmed city. It seemed impossible that she should fall into the hands of her foes. We grow careless and confident through a series of fortunate escapes. But our confidence is irrational unless it has any deeper ground. 4. *The favour of God is no protection against the punishment of sin.* The Jews regarded themselves as Divine favourites. They had received many peculiar privileges. But these made the duty of fidelity only the more obligatory. For the most favoured people to be faithless was a great and terrible wickedness. Indeed, the favour of God, instead of mitigating punishment, makes a heavier penalty to be fitting for those who are so ungrateful as to sin against it.

II. SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE SIEGE. 1. *It was thorough.* The great king Nebuchadnezzar came in person and "all" his army, and pitched a camp and built forts. Every effort was made to secure the city. The instruments of Divine vengeance are terrible, earnest, and vigorous. 2. *It was protracted.* It lasted for eighteen months How wearily those days and weeks and months must have dragged themselves along, every hour increasing the agony! But what is this period to the vast, dim reaches of the "punishment of the ages," which awaits lost souls? 3. *It produced horrible sufferings.* In the madness of famine, women devoured their own children. Thus God punished (1) "satiation and disgust towards his holy Word and soul-food; (2) the terrible offering up of children to Moloch; (3) the loose discipline of children" (Cramer, quoted by Naegelsbach). From a merely selfish position, who that knew and realized the frightful consequences of his sins would bring these upon his head for the sake of the poor pleasures of an hour? 4. *It was successful.* The siege ended in the capture of Jerusalem. The force of Nebuchadnezzar was great and terrible, but behind it was the judicial will of Heaven. To withstand this was certainly futile. All resistance to

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the decrees of Divine judgment must be vain. Our one hope is not in opposition, but in penitent cries for God's mercy and unresisting submission to his will.

Vers. 8—11.—*The fate of Zedekiah.* I. THE CAUSES WHICH LED TO THE FATE OF ZEDEKIAH. 1. *The general calamity of his nation.* The king suffers with his people. Unfortunately it too often happens that an innocent people is punished for the fault of its sovereign. We must not be surprised if the converse is sometimes true. We are all members one of another. Not only kings, but in a less degree private individuals, must expect to share the troubles of the community, apart from the exact measure of private desert. In this life the execution of Divine justice is general; in the next life it will be particular—then the judgment will be individualistic. 2. *His own sin.* Zedekiah did "evil in the eyes of the Lord" (ver. 2). Others may have done worse and escaped. But if we have no more severe a fate than we deserve, we can find no ground for complaint in the fact that more wicked men receive (at present) a milder treatment. 3. *His weakness.* Zedekiah was more weak than wicked. It is often observable in history that the weak king suffers calamities which the bad king escapes. But weakness is a culpable defect in a sovereign. If he is not strong enough for his duties he should resign the reins of power. No one has a right to retain a post which he cannot efficiently fulfil. Moral weakness is always wrong—to be blamed as much as to be pitied—for it can be overcome (Isa. xl. 29—31). 4. *His erroneous policy.* Zedekiah was set on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar; he plotted with Pharaoh against his suzerain; and when his rebellion roused the vengeance of Babylon, he found Egypt to be only "a broken reed." In his case the vanity of trust in princes was illustrated. 5. *The will of God.* The fate of Zedekiah had been predicted by Jeremiah (xxxiv. 1—7). The prophecy implied a Divine decree. God has no hard, cruel decrees irrespective of our conduct and will. But following our wrong-doing, God's fixed counsels of judgment make flight hopeless.

II. THE LEADING FEATURES OF THE FATE OF ZEDEKIAH. 1. *He was captured in the agonies of flight.* According to Josephus, this was not till he had reached the banks of the Jordan. How terrible to be so nearly saved, and yet to fall a prey to vengeance at last! To be only almost saved is worse than never to have had a hope of deliverance. They who have been near to the kingdom of heaven and have not entered it will feel the more bitterly the doom that they will share with the city of Destruction. "Remember Lot's wife." 2. *He was carried to Babylon and tried before King Nebuchadnezzar.* The triumph of the great monarch was the shame of his vassal. 3. *His children were slain before his eyes.* Parents suffer in the sufferings of their children more than in the pain of their own bodies. The action of Nebuchadnezzar was cruel, brutal, devilish. There are no such spiteful elements in God's punishment of the wicked. His is given in sorrow and with reluctance. 4. *His eyes were put out.* Here was the greatest refinement of cruelty. Zedekiah's sight was preserved till he had witnessed the death-agonies of his children. Then he was blinded, so that the last vision to dwell in his memory was the harrowing spectacle of his children's massacre. But after so terrible a sight would the wretched man care to look on the light of day? 5. *He was detained in prison till his death*—a punishment worse than death. Dethroned, humiliated, in chains, in a dungeon, bereaved of his children, the poor blind king is left to the agony of his own bitter thoughts. May God deliver us from a similar fate in the future world!

Ver. 13.—*The destruction of the temple.* I. THE GREATEST EARTHLY SPLENDOUR IS DESTRUCTIBLE. Solomon's temple was the pride of the Jews. For centuries it had stood mellowing with age. But when the brutal Chaldeans flung their torches at it the magnificent pile of buildings was soon reduced to a mass of smouldering ruins. *Sic transit gloria mundi.* An invasion, a revolution, a conflagration, may destroy the work of years in a night. Splendid possessions are poor refuges. A palace is not necessarily a castle.

II. THERE IS NO SAFETY IN HOLY PLACES AND CONSECRATED THINGS. The temple was burnt, and its treasures and sacred vessels were carried to Babylon. The flames that leaped up on the private houses of Jerusalem found no charmed circle to keep them off from the temple. The building was holy only in so far as it was put to holy uses. But when it was desecrated by sin no magical influence could prevent it from complete

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destruction. And if the temple could not preserve itself, much less could it protect its superstitious devotees. It was vain indeed for them to cry, "The temple of the Lord," as though the words were a spell to ward off trouble. Thus all who trust in holy sites, ceremonial services, etc., apart from spiritual devotion, will find their faith wrecked, even if the idol of their superstition is not destroyed.

III. WHEN THE SPIRIT OF DEVOTION HAS FORSAKEN A TEMPLE THE DESTRUCTION OF THE BUILDING MAY BE A GOOD RATHER THAN AN EVIL. The temple is then worse than useless; it is a snare, tempting men to believe that all is well so long as it stands. So the ordinances of religion delude men into false confidence. While these are duly administered with imposing solemnity, it is difficult to believe that the spirit of religion has fled. Let these go too and men have their eyes open to their true condition. The temple without true worship is a mockery to God. When the soul has gone the body had better be put away as soon as possible. If the Christian has ceased to offer spiritual sacrifices in his body as in a temple of the Holy Ghost, his life is no longer of any true value. When this temple is destroyed the fate is striking and alarming, yet it is but little after its sad desecration through sin.

IV. THE ONLY DURABLE WORK IS SPIRITUAL AND HOLY WORK. "Each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire" (1 Cor. iii. 13). There will be a test to the work of life. This may be splendid as a temple, but if it is unholy and earthly in character it must pass away ultimately. How many temples, and cities, and kingdoms, "cloud-capped towers, and gorgeous palaces" have left "not a rack behind"! It is the spiritual work of a man that endures. Even this fails, fruitless, unless it is good in character.

Ver. 16.—*Sparing the poor.* I. THE FACT. Whilst the king, the nobles, the wealthy, and many others were carried into exile, certain of the poor were still left in the land. We are accustomed to speak of the hardships of poverty, but there are compensating advantages not a few. Many evils of the worst character only visit the rich. In times of public trouble the houses of the rich are attacked and the persons of the great are threatened, while the poor are left in happy neglect. Great men are beset with anxieties such as are unknown to the simpler lives of the poor. Who would be a king now that kings are all marks for the assassin? In those countries where the sovereign is compelled to take elaborate precautions for his safety, the poor citizen can move about the streets without fear. The one is a prisoner in his own palace, the other a free man with liberty to roam over the whole kingdom. Ambition aims at distinction, but that is a poor crown to win. Distinguished men have peculiar vexations and dangers of their own. There is more happiness in obscurity. The wise man will say, "Give me neither poverty nor riches;" and the Christian will add, "Not my will, but thine, be done," knowing well that for him that lot is best which his heavenly Father assigns to him.

II. THE EXPLANATION. What was there in the condition of the poor to induce the Chaldeans to spare them? 1. *Their innocence.* The peasants had not been plotting against Nebuchadnezzar, and the vengeance that the Babylonian monarch vented on the king and the seat of his government was naturally averted from the quiet country-folk. These men were also more innocent in the sight of God. The leading people had shown their faithlessness in turning from Jehovah to Egypt; they, too, had probably descended the lowest in the vices of the age, which brought upon the nation the wrath of God. Poor men may be bad men. But there are sins to which they are less liable than great men. 2. *Their weakness.* While the great men were removed to Babylon, there would appear to be little danger of an insurrection among the poor people scattered over the farms, who had enough to do to earn their daily bread. There is a protection in weakness. A little strength often courts danger. They who are weak in themselves may be strong in the protection of God's providence. 3. *Their usefulness.* These poor people were left to work as "vine-dressers and husbandmen." Nebuchadnezzar had no wish to see his newly acquired territory converted into a desert. It was for his advantage that some of the people should be spared. There is no protection like usefulness. Be serviceable and you will be safe. He who lives for the real good of his fellow-men and the glory of his great Master may be sure that no harm can touch him so long as he is faithful to his task.

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Vers. 31—34.—*The deliverance of Jehoiachin.* The new king signalized his accession to power by an act of clemency. Possibly he saw no reason to continue the cruelty of his predecessor now that the Jews were quieted; possibly he was influenced by Daniel. Whatever the cause of it may have been, it is pleasant to see how mercy "becomes the throned monarch better than his crown."

I. DELIVERANCE MAY COME AT LENGTH AFTER PROLONGED SUFFERING. Jehoiachin had endured thirty-seven years of imprisonment. He must have lost hope long before his liberation. Yet the longest night has its end. If trouble outlast life, there is the blessed liberator, death, that ultimately frees the most wretched from his distresses. Then what will thirty-seven years of suffering be to the ages of eternity? It is a weary time to endure, but, compared with the life beyond, it will seem both light and brief.

II. THE PROLONGED ENDURANCE OF SUFFERING MUST MAKE THE RETURN OF THE COMMON MERCIES OF LIFE A WONDERFUL BLESSING. What a meaning there is in the word "liberty" in the ears of the captive! Only the sufferers from thirst know the sweetness of water. The sick, when restored, enjoy health as the strong never can. Jehoiachin would find his change of circumstances wonderful beyond all expression.

III. NO EARTHLY DELIVERANCE IS PERFECT. The old man had endured captivity so long that he must have been bewildered and distracted by his release. For him, once a proud tyrant, now an aged, humiliated captive, crushed with the imprisonment of more than a third of a century, the thoughtless merriment of a court would seem like the life of another world or like a dream of childhood. His sufferings must have been too severe and too protracted for him to enter at once into the liberty and honour that were offered to him. One can scarcely think that he could ever feel at home with them. We know not what will be the first impressions of a new world when the soul escapes from its earthly captivity and enters the court of heaven. But there is an essential difference between Jehoiachin's condition and this. Jehoiachin remained an old man, worn with suffering as well as with years. The Christian has the gift of eternal life. To him the liberation by death is more than a change of external circumstances. He looks for the renewal of the fresh vigour of youth. Jehoiachin was never restored to his kingdom; at best he was an honoured subject of Babylon. But the Christian is restored to more than the primitive rights of man—to glory and kingship. Finally, there is no indication that Jehoiachin was changed in character. His long, lonely sufferings and the many reflections of thirty-seven years of imprisonment may have humbled him to penitence. But the historian does not appear to know of any such change. Yet a man's greatest enemy is himself. Deliverance of the body from a dungeon is a small boon if the soul is still captive to sin. The salvation in Christ effects this complete deliverance.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*Zedekiah.* (Cf. former homily, ch. xxxvii. 1.)—C.

Ver. 3.—*The Lord creating evil.* This is one of the passages of Scripture the meaning of which does not lie on the surface. It seems to represent God as instigating sin. For "through the anger of the Lord" it is said "that Zedekiah rebelled." But it was for that very rebellion he was so sorely punished, and yet it is said it was "through the Lord." Note—

I. THERE ARE OTHER PASSAGES LIKE THIS. Cf. "the Lord hardening Pharaoh's heart." The history of Judas. "None of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled" (John xvii. 12). Again, "Is there evil in the city and I have not done it?" (Amos iii. 6; Isa. xlv. 7). And St. Peter's word to the Jews on the day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 23). They wickedly did what nevertheless God had determined before to be done. And there are yet other Scriptures besides these.

II. THEY GIVE RISE TO GREAT DIFFICULTY. It is not difficult to understand that men should do wrong, or even the particular wrong which is charged against them and for which they are punished; but the difficulty is that the sin should be seemingly ascribed to God. And the Jews seem to have believed that God did prompt men to sin; cf. John ix. 1, "Who did sin, this man or his parents *in order that* (*ἵνα*) he should be born blind?"

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The effect, the man's blindness, they looked on as designed and intended by God, and hence the cause producing that effect must have been designed also. As we read over Scriptures like these, the question of Abram starts immediately to our lips, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (cf. Rom. iii. 5—8). God "may and must transcend our understanding. He will by the very nature of the case dazzle and confound our imagination by the unsuspected riches and glory of his many mansions; but he must not trouble our *sense of right* if he would retain our homage and our love." But it is this sense of right that *is* troubled by what seems to be the teaching of Scriptures like these. They seem to teach that God prompts men to sin and then punishes them for it. Some who reasoned with St. Paul appear to have suggested (cf. Rom. iii.) that in such cases God was "unrighteous" who took "vengeance." The apostle does not attempt to argue the matter, but treats the suggestion with a sort of "Get thee behind me, Satan," which is what his μὴ γένοιτο really amounts to. And where the suggestion is made from mere captious motives, or with the intent only to support a foregone conclusion and determination to disregard God, then such a reply is the proper one to make. But it can never be other than right to endeavour to meet the honest difficulties which some of the utterances of God's Word and some of the actings of his providence do unquestionably give rise to. If the suggestion were true that God made men to sin and then damned them for it, nothing could be more horrible, and no possible force could make men trust, love, or sincerely worship a God who would act so. But the suggestion is not true; for—

III. THE DIFFICULTY IS APPARENT, NOT REAL. God is never the author of sin. "The Lord is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works." "Let no man say when he is tempted," etc. (cf. Jas. i. 13). But when sin has been begotten in a man's soul by his own evil desires, then *the special form* in which that sin shall manifest itself *is* very often ordered by God. This is how we understand all these passages. That very Babylon in connection with which this ver. 3 is written may supply an apt illustration. Isaiah calls Babylon "the desert of the sea," for when, by reason of the melting of the snows which fed the Euphrates and her many tributaries, the great river overflowed its banks, the great plain on which Babylon stood became like a vast sea. But the great Assyrian lords cut their canals and constructed their massive dams and reservoirs so that the superabundant and otherwise destructive waters were directed into safe channels, and could do no further harm. Those monarchs were not the authors of the floods, but by their skill and wisdom they directed which way those floods should flow. On one of our great railways a little while ago, a signalman saw to his horror that an engine had somehow got away without its driver, and was rushing on with ever-increasing speed to its own destruction and that of the first unhappy passenger train—and one was nearly due—that it should meet. Quick as thought the signalman seized his levers and turned the runaway into a siding where it could harm no one but itself. In every large fire the firemen act in a similar way. *And so God.* When sin has broken out by no will of his, but altogether contrary to his will, he does not let it run riot, as it might, but he *orders the way it shall take.* Thence it came to pass "through the Lord" that "Zedekiah rebelled against the King of Babylon" (ver. 3).

IV. THIS ORDERING OF SIN'S WAY ON THE PART OF GOD IS A THING MUCH TO BE REMEMBERED. 1. *For our consolation and comfort.* Mad and monstrous as sin is, it is yet under God's control. Like as to the raging sea, he can say and does say to it, "Thus far shalt thou go, and no further," etc., and cf. ch. v. 22. 2. *For the warning of the sinner.* The flames of the eternal fire are lit within our own soul. Sin is ever twisting and knotting its own scourge. What a man soweth that shall he also reap. The seed of all our punishments was sown by our own hand, though we never intended the harvest. The way sin shall take is utterly out of our power. If it does somewhat that we did intend, it does for men that we never dreamt of nor desired. 3. *For instruction to all thoughtful readers of God's Word and beholders of his providence.* God "does" the evil that is in the city (Isa. xlv.), but he does not originate it, and that which he does is but *the ordering of its way.*—C.

Vers. 4—34.—*The march of doom.* These verses tell of the awful progress of the judgment of God on the doomed city of Jerusalem, her king, and people. To all who imagine that God is too full of love and graciousness to sternly judge and punish men, the contemplation of the events told of here may be painful, but assuredly they will

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be salutary also. We are shown the Babylonian armies gathering round the city; the long and dreadful siege; the gaunt famine that fastens upon the besieged; the walls broken at last and the inrush of the infuriated foe; the flight, capture, and tragedy of the king; the burning of the city and temple; and the carrying off into exile or slaughter of all but the poorest of the people. Ten weary years are covered by these events, and they were years full of lamentation, affliction, and woe. Now, all this teaches plainly—

I. THAT THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD ARE SLOW TO BEGIN. He is slow to anger. How long he bore with Judah and Jerusalem ere these tribulations came!

II. BUT WHEN BEGUN THEY GO ON. What a procession of one calamity after another it is!

III. THEY CANNOT BE ARRESTED OR TURNED ASIDE. All that endurance, courage, and skill could do was done in that memorable siege. Cf. Ezek. vii. 6, "An evil, an only evil, behold, it is come," etc.

IV. THE DISTRESS AND ANGUISH DEEPEN. (Cf. Ezek. vii.; viii.; xi.; Lam. ii. 11, 12, 19; iv. 4, etc.)

V. THEY ARE RELENTLESS AND KNOW NO PITY. Prayers and entreaties are in vain (cf. Prov. i. 24—31).

VI. THEY CEASE NOT TILL THEIR WORK IS DONE. See this history. The heart of the deceived evil-doer protests that God cannot deal so. But he has dealt so with ungodly men, not once nor twice alone; and when he declares that he will again, of what avail is man's mere protest that he will not? Cf. the whole Book of the Revelation. How loudly, therefore, do facts like these cry out to the sinner, "Flee from the wrath to come"!—C.

Vers. 4, 6, 12.—*Days whose duties are indelible.* Note the particularity of the dates given in each of these verses. Not the year only, but the month; and not the month only, but the day; and sometimes not the day only, but the hour, whether morning or evening, during the light or dark. Now—

I. THERE ARE SUCH DAYS. In the record of the Flood we have such exactness of date. And in the later history of Jerusalem, the story of its decline and fall under its last kings, we again and again, as in this chapter, meet with such careful giving of exact dates. And in our own experience, looking back over the record of our lives, how vividly some dates stand out! We know the year, the month, the day, and hour, and it seems likely that we shall never forget them nor the events connected with them.

II. BUT THESE DAYS ARE NEARLY ALWAYS DAYS OF PAIN AND DISTRESS. It was so in the instances given in these verses. There are anniversaries which we keep, but these are for the most part joyous days, the memory of which we will not willingly let die. But the fact of our keeping them shows that there is probability that such memory would die if we did not carefully keep it up. But the days whose dates are indelible need no anniversaries to remind us of them. We cannot forget them, though, perhaps, we would fain do so. They are burnt in upon our souls so deeply that they are written as on a rock for ever. And they are days, not of joy, but of sore distress; as when first the fierce Babylonian forces beleagured the holy city, and as when after weary months of obstinate defence the awful famine at length broke them down; and as when the proud conqueror in his rage burned down the sanctuary of God. Days of judgment were they, never to be forgotten by Israel any more. And there were many such days. We read of the "fasts" of the different months, many of which commemorated these sad events.

III. AND THEIR DATES ARE INDELIBLY WRITTEN IN OUR SOULS. 1. *Because of the contrast* which they offer to well-nigh all other days. If any mark stands out conspicuous—like the black marks on a white page, or white on black—it proves that the ground upon which such mark stands out so conspicuously is of an entirely opposite colour, a complete contrast. And so the very blackness of these indelible days proves that the days against which they stand out so conspicuously have been of a far other and happier kind. Our very trials, by the vividness with which we remember them, prove the general goodness of our God, because they are such exception to his rule. 2. *Because of their intensity.* The mark is not merely dark, but deep. The sword pierces through the soul. It is the intensity of the pain that makes it so memorable. 3. *Because of the shadow they cast.* All our after life may be darkened—it often is so—by

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the effect of some awful blow, and the shadow ever starts from and guides our thoughts up to the terrible fact which has caused it.

IV. BUT THESE DATES ARE NOT INDELIBLE FOR EVER. Cf. our Lord's illustration: "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, . . . but as soon as she is delivered . . . she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy." So it is oftentimes even in this world. Life would not be bearable were all sorrows indelible. But they are not. The lapse of time, the pressure of necessary work, the awakening of other interests, and, above all, the bestowment of new joys—all tend to scatter the gloom of the soul and to thrust into oblivion memories that could only give pain. And none of them shall follow us into our eternal home. We shall not—it does not appear possible—forget facts that have occurred, but we shall see them in such new lights and irradiated by such love of God that all the pain that belonged to them will depart and be seen no more.

"Help, Lord, that we may come
To thy saints' happy home,
Where a thousand years
As one day appears;
Nor go
Where one day appears
As a thousand years
For woe!"

C.

Ver. 6.—*Famine.* One of the most frightful that ever befell any city is told of here. Its ghastly details may be traced out from this verse and different parts of the writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. This verse tells how the store of bread gradually failed; ch. xxxvii. 21 and xxxviii. 29 with what difficulty ever so little was gained (also Ezek. v. 16; v. 16; xii. 19). Then Lam. iv. 7 and v. 10 tell of the sufferings of the nobles; Lam. iv. 5 and Ezek. iv. 12—15 of the degradation of the high-born ladies of Jerusalem, snatching morsels of bread from the dunghills. The cries of the poor little children (Lam. ii. 11, 12, 19; iv. 4); the hard-heartedness of their parents (Lam. iv. 3). Fathers ate the flesh of their own sons (Ezek. v. 10); mothers that of their new-born babes (Lam. ii. 20; iv. 10). Thus frightful was this famine. And it is ever a fearful thing, let the cause be what it may. Note—

I. WHEREFORE THEY ARE SENT. 1. *As punishment:* (1) *For violation of natural law.* When men will crowd together in space too limited or on lands that will not yield sufficient, or will out of greed or selfishness refuse to cultivate aright the land they have, then sooner or later famine will come. (2) *For violation of Divine laws.* So in the case of famine told of here. But: 2. *They are sent as prompters and promoters of repentance and amendment.* In case of violated natural laws they have again and again performed this needed office. Men have spread themselves abroad, communications between one district and another have been opened up, improved methods of cultivation have been adopted, wiser and juster laws have been enacted, and men's energies and thoughts have been roused to devise remedies and safeguards against the recurrence of the evil. And when it is the Divine laws that have been violated, the Divine laws against sin—for natural laws are also Divine—famine has brought many a prodigal to himself, and led him to say, "I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned." It did so in the case of the Jews.

II. BUT FAMINE IS AN UNNECESSARY AND UNNATURAL THING. For in our Father's house there is bread enough and to spare, and none need perish with hunger. The world contains ample store; the resources of nature are in no degree exhausted, and therefore it can only be by negligence of God's laws in nature that famine can in ordinary cases occur. And why need any go away into the far country of sin, and so compel the righteous and loving Father to send such sore judgment after them in order to bring them back? "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself!" It is not according to God's will in any case.

III. AND WHAT IS TRUE OF THE LITERAL IS TRUE ALSO OF THE SPIRITUAL FAMINE. 1. *It is caused by man's disobedience.* So it was at the first. Sin thrust him forth from the Father's house, the happy home where he never knew what want was. And so it is still. Had those who knew of Christ and his redemption but obeyed the word, "Let

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him that heareth say, Come," long ere this the whole world would have been evangelized. And if the same command were obeyed now, the like result would speedily follow. Christ has given a self-propagating power to his Church, which it has failed to use, and therefore spiritual famines are and will be until the Church obeys her Lord's commands. But: 2. *Such famine need not be.* Christ is the "Bread of life" for all, and there is enough and to spare for all.

CONCLUSION. Let not thy brother hunger if thou canst give him of this bread. Think of what famine means, and let thy charity be aroused. Take care that thou eatest—not merely talkest—of the Bread of life thyself.—C.

Vers. 8—11.—*The irony of a name.* These verses tell of King Zedekiah—of the tragedy of Zedekiah, we might say, for never was there a tragedy more terrible than that in which he bore the chief part. But think of his name—"Jehovah our Righteousness." "As the last note of Jeremiah's dirge over Jehoiachin died away, he had burst forth into one of those strains of hope, in which he had represented the future ruler of Israel as the righteousness or justice of Jehovah (cf. ch. xxiii. 5—7). It may be that, in allusion to this, the new king assumed that name Zedek-Jah on his accession to the throne. He was a mere youth, but not without noble feelings which, in a less critical moment, might have saved the state." And his very name attested the hope which was cherished concerning him. But read the history of his career and his awful fate, and see if ever there could be sadder irony than in the name he bore. It was a glorious name, but how miserably belied! Defeated, dethroned, disgraced, bereaved, tortured, blind, an exile, a slave,—so he dragged out the last weary years of his life. We know not how many they were, we can only hope they were but few.

I. SUCH IRONY OF NAMES IS FREQUENT. The degenerate bearers of noble and hallowed names are many. The children of Abraham were told by our Lord that they were children of the devil. A good name should be an inspiration; it often is; *noblesse oblige.* That it may be so is often the motive wherewith it is given by parents to their children. But, as with Zedekiah, their character and their names are in sad contrast.

II. NOTE THE CAUSE OF THIS SAD IRONY IN THIS CASE. It was *not lack of right knowledge.* For a while he was under the teaching and influence of God's prophet Jeremiah. And men rarely go wrong from lack of knowledge. *Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor.* Nor for *lack of right feeling.* He had again and again good purposes and aspirations. So with men like him. Nor were there wanting *sundry endeavours to act according as God prompted him.* He made one and another attempt. But the secret of his sad failure was his *lack of strength,* infirmity of will, weakness of resolve. And thus it perpetually is with men who turn out failures in life. There is no more pitiful sight in this world than the spectacle of these ruined men. Jeremiah lamented bitterly over Zedekiah, as he well might.

III. LET THIS ILL-APPLIED NAME LEAD US TO THINK OF HIM WHOSE NAME WAS NOTHING BUT BLESSED TRUTH—JESUS. He was called Jesus because "he should save his people from their sins." For in him is the remedy for all such as Zedekiah was. Give up our will to him, come to be in him by a living faith, and his strength shall be reproduced in us, and out of weakness we shall be made strong.—C.

Vers. 1—3.—*Zedekiah as king.* I. THE POSITION OF A YOUNG MAN. He was twenty-one years old when he began to reign. Out of boyhood, looking round him at a time when he had become responsible for the conduct of his life. In England the age of twenty-one is full of significance to many young men, for then they become free from legal disabilities and restrictions. Any young man about the age of Zedekiah becomes thereby an object of special interest.

II. AN UNEXPECTED POSITION. At least we may fairly assume this from 2 Kings xxiv. 17. Zedekiah was not in the succession. Of course it is just possible there may have been aims and intrigues by which Zedekiah gained the crown. But that does not make less noticeable the fact that young men often do find themselves in unexpected positions. They have been making ready for one course, when all in a moment they are turned into a new course where they have to act without much time for consideration.

III. A RESPONSIBLE POSITION. Responsible in any case as that of a young man;

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peculiarly responsible as being called to a throne. To be called to a position of peculiar responsibility may sober a man if he is inclined to be reckless, may rouse him if inclined to be easy-going and self-indulgent. This point may be illustrated by the traditional belief in the change that came over Henry V. on his accession to the throne, especially as this view is brought out in Shakespeare.

IV. A POSITION UNUSUALLY DIFFICULT. A king appointed by a foreign conqueror would be regarded with dislike by many. In such circumstances the best of personal qualities were needed, decision of character combined with the utmost circumspection.

V. A POSITION IN WHICH ZEDEKIAH HAD A COMPETENT ADVISER. Not any of his own courtiers, though there may have been men among them marked by prudence and insight. He has a prophet of Jehovah, a man with a keen sense of right and wrong, a man with revelations from on high, to help him. Moreover, it is on record that he actually sought Jeremiah out. Note the many references in the course of the book to the dealings between the king and the prophet. By the plain speaking of such a man many doubts might be cleared and many errors corrected. It is the censure on Zedekiah (2 Chron. xxxvi. 12) that "he humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the Lord."—Y.

Ver. 8.—*Zedekiah's army scattered.* Zedekiah's aim was to keep his army together, for as long as he could do that there was a chance of averting the evil day, and perhaps in the end escaping it altogether. But without his army he was utterly helpless. He could not bring himself to heed Jeremiah's counsels, doing the right and putting his trust in Jehovah. And so when the army was gone everything was gone. Nothing remained but random, desperate attempts at flight, and the certainty of ultimate capture. We have to ask ourselves what we shall do when our army is scattered from us, when the resources of our own making are vanished. The chief battles of our life are not to be fought with external resources at all. In every warfare where the weapons are carnal the weapons must fail at last. Only when we are engaged in truly spiritual warfare, and have the hosts of heaven on our side, can we be sure that our army will not be scattered from us.—Y.

Ver. 11.—*Zedekiah's fate.* Here is a triple bondage—the bondage of blindness, fetters, and imprisonment. Truly a dreadful doom! Look—

I. AT THE CAUSE OF IT. 1. *The cause so far as it lies in his own conduct.* There was no need for him to accept a throne as viceroy for Babylon, but, having done so, he had entered into an implied covenant. No wonder that the King of Babylon took special care to stamp such conduct in a peculiar way. 2. *The cause so far as it lies in the notions of the time.* Zedekiah was treated, not only vindictively, but savagely. The meaning must have been to humiliate him, to make the iron enter into his very soul. What a difference Christianity has made in the treatment of conquered foes! The change has come very slowly, but it is real and stable. One cannot imagine the time returning when a captured enemy would be deprived of his eyesight.

II. AT A CONTRAST IMMEDIATELY SUGGESTED. One cannot but think of Samson, whose external condition was exactly that of Zedekiah, blinded, fettered, and imprisoned. Reduced to this state the Philistines reckoned he was impotent. Zedekiah really was impotent; he seems to have gone on to the day of his death in monotonous submission to what he felt necessity. But it was only necessity because he made it so. The worst limitations our fellow-men can put on us may become in certain conditions like an easily snapped thread. Zedekiah might have risen above all these insults and pains. Perhaps he did rise. It is well for us to recollect how God has placed the essential liberty of every individual in his own hands.—Y.

Vers. 12, 13.—*A great burning.* I. THE BURNING IN GENERAL. The sum of the details amounts to a statement that the city was reduced to ashes. For this not Babylon is to be blamed, but Zedekiah and his predecessors, together with their advisers. Babylon was only acting according to the fashion of the times. The hand of Jehovah was withdrawn, the hand that might have averted the torch; and it was withdrawn because the destruction of Jerusalem had become a better thing for the world than its preservation. Still, it is not to be said in the fullest sense of the word that *Jehovah*

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destroyed Jerusalem say as he destroyed *Babylon*. In the course of a few generations Jerusalem rose from its ashes, temple included. The mere destruction of buildings, terrible as it is at the time, may soon be got over, as witness the rebuilding of London, and Chicago. The decay of national spirit and national resources is the thing to be feared.

II. THE BURNING OF THE TEMPLE IN PARTICULAR. Babylon had no fear in destroying the house of the Lord. Doubtless it was quite a common thing in war to destroy the temples of gods, for they were looked upon merely as part of the resources of nations. We must distinguish between what is essentially sacred and what is sacred only by association and to serve a purpose. When the purpose is accomplished the sacred sinks back into the common. God dwelleth not in temples made with hands. He was none the poorer for all this burning. Babylon learned hereafter that, though his house had been burned, his power was not at all diminished. The chief value of the temple lay in this, that it had been an expression of the piety and devotion of David and Solomon. Kings and people alike had proved themselves unworthy of their great ancestors.—Y.

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HOMILETICAL INDEX

TO

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH.

VOLUME II.

CHAPTER XXX.

THEME	PAGE
"Scripture—the Written Word of God"	3
"Fear not"	4
Divine Healing	5
Joys of Redemption	5
Written in a Book; or, Words held over	6
The Twofold Wonder of Israel's Salvation	7
The Multitude of God's Mercies ...	7
The Ideal Ruler	8

CHAPTER XXXI.

The Close Relations of God and his People...	15
The Everlasting Love of God	16, 32, 40
Rachel weeping for her Children	17, 24
Ephraim's Return	18
Divine Satisfaction	19
Heredity and Individual Responsibility	19
The New Covenant ...	20, 25, 37
Guarantees of Perpetuity	21
Grace preparing for Grace	22
The Character of the Divine Law inferred from its History	23
The Unity of the Church	23
The Redemption of Israel a Great and Notable Event	24
Ephraim bemoaning himself; or the Penitent's Restoration	25
Missions put an End to	26
The New Jerusalem	27
The Restoration of Israel	28
The Steps of the Kingdom of God ...	29
Trouble lessened by Increase ...	31
God's Will done at Last	33
The Scatterer the Gatherer ...	33, 42
Strong, Stronger, Strongest ...	34
Satisfied	35
Strong Consolation	35
Bemoaning One's Self	36
Conversion and Repentance ...	37
Great Encouragements for those returning to God	38
God the Husband of his People ...	40
Work yet to be found in the Vineyard	41
God the Gatherer of his People ...	42
Praise waiting for God in Zion ...	43
Sorrowing Mothers and their Consolation	44
Sweet Sleep	45
Jehovah visiting the Individual for his Sins	45
The New Covenant and the Old ...	46
The Seed of Israel; Signs of its Everlasting Duration	47

CHAPTER XXXII.

Faith tested by Action	50
The Prayer of a Perplexed Soul ...	51
The Omnipotence of God	52
Unity	53

Digitized by Google

THEME	PAGE
God rejoicing	53
Silencing a Prophet	54
Purchasing by Divine Command ...	55
The Prayer of Jeremiah	55
The Unities of the Divine Kingdom	56
A Story of God's Sustaining Grace ...	56
O Blessed Death!	58
A Parable of Redemption	59
Nothing hid from God	59
Truth confessed, but not realized ...	60
Love's Labour apparently lost ...	61
The Refiner's Fire	63
The Ratio of Sorrow and Joy ...	64
Jeremiah showing his Faith by his Works	65
Man's Neglect of God's Teaching ...	66
The Bonds of Abiding Attachment to God	66
Evil the Measure of Good	67

CHAPTER XXXIII.

An Invitation to Prayer	69
Forgiveness and Cleansing ...	70
The Church an Honour to God ...	71
Town and Country Life	71
"The Branch of Righteousness" ...	72
Nature's Aids to Faith	73
Revelation of God's Purpose to him who performs his Will	74
Perpetuation of the Kingly and Priestly Stock	74
The Covenant of God permanent as the Laws of Nature	75
The Reasonableness of Prayer ...	76
The Divine Treatment of Sin ...	78
Fruits of Pardon	79
Paradise lost and regained	79
The Prophet's Refrain	80
"The Lord our Righteousness" ...	81
Do the Prophets prophesy falsely? ...	81
The Abundance of Peace and Truth	83
The Mournful Stillness of the Present, and the Gladsome Voices of the Future	83
Returning Flocks...	84
The Righteous Scion of David ...	84
King and Priest in Perpetuity ...	85

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A King's Doom	87
Superficial Repentance	87
Liberal Punishment for Illiberal Conduct	88
False Obedience	89
The Lord, the Prophet, and the King	90
The Woe of Weakness	90
Playing Fast and Loose with God ...	92
Slavery	92
A Right Act done in a Wrong Spirit	93

CHAPTER XXXV.

The Rechabites	95
Filial Obedience	96
Temptation by Divine Command ...	97
The Filial Obedience of the Rechabites	97
The Blessing of the Rechabites ...	98
Fathers of Temperance	99
The Children put to Shame by the Stranger	100
The Divine Long-Suffering worn out	100
Rewards of Filial Piety	101
The Power of a Father's Command...	101
Rechabites unconsciously reproving Israelites	102
God's Recognition of the Rechabite Obedience	102

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The Writing of the Roll	105
The Reading of the Roll	106
The Burning of the Roll	107
The Rewriting of the Roll ...	108
The Development of Revelation ...	109
Vicarious Ministry in Holy Things ...	110
Free Course of the Word of God ...	111
The Mystery of Inspiration ...	111
"Jehoiakim's Penknife"	111
"The Lord hid them"	112
The Word of God: wherein it can and wherein it cannot be destroyed	113
Hearers of God's Word	113
The Written Word	114
"It may be"	115
The Indestructible Word	116
The Lord's Hidden Ones ...	117, 120
Disaster not Defeat	117
God's Eye to Every Possibility ...	118
"Things New and Old"	118
Burning the Word of the Lord ...	119

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THEME	PAGE
Prayer without Obedience	121
Self-Deception	122
The Irresistible Will of God ...	123
Jeremiah imprisoned as a Traitor ...	124
Hopes that betray	124
God's Purpose independent of Means	125
The Servant of God accused of Treason	125
"Give us of your Oil"	125
Building on the Sand	126
"Be not deceived"	127
Falsely accused	127
Characteristics of Injustice ...	127
"Out of Weakness made Strong" ...	128
The Rough Wind stayed in the Day of the East Wind	128
A Request for Intercession ...	128
Israel's Delusion as to its Enemy ...	129
The Secret Question of a King and the Bold Answer of a Prophet ...	130

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Jeremiah in the Pit	132
The Apparent Misanthropy of Revelation	133
"Old Cast Clouts and Old Rotten Rags"	133, 137
The Fear of Ridicule	134
The Blessedness of Obedience ...	134
Foreshadowings and Analogies of the Cross	135
Ebed-Melech; or, Unlooked-for Sympathy and Help	136
God's Terms of Salvation Hard ...	138
Counted an Enemy for Speaking the Truth	138
"Put not your Trust in Princes" ...	139
"Cast Down, but not Forsaken" ...	140
The Value of an Oath	140
The Path of Obedience the Path of Safety	141
Trying to serve Two Masters ...	141
A Question of Casuistry	141
Prophecy and Patriotism	142
A Friend in Need	143
Obeying the Voice of the Lord ...	144
The End of Zedekiah's Irresolution...	144
The Unkingly Position of a King ...	145

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A Prophet befriended by a Heathen King	147
Spared on the Ground of Faith ...	148
The Poor Better off than the Rich	148, 152, 155
God's Servant delivered from the Judgment of Transgressors ...	148
"So he dwelt among the People" ...	149
Faith's Reward	149
The Retribution of God	150
Too Late	151
Churchwardens	153
"In that ye ministered to the Saints"	153
Siege and Savagery	154
The Safety of God's Prophet ...	154
Ebed-Melech's Safety, and the Secret of it	156

CHAPTER XL.

Jeremiah's Release	157
The Choice of a Residence	158
The Duties of Adversity and their Reward	159
The Murder of Gedaliah; or, Noble Credulity	159
The Blind seeing, the Seeing blind	160
"A Strait betwixt Two"	161
"That we may be Godly and quietly governed"	161
Misplaced Charity	162
Jeremiah a Free Agent	163
The Difficulties of a Governor ...	163
Trusting a Traitor	164

CHAPTER XLI.

The Assassination of Gedaliah ...	165
The Slaughter of the Pilgrims ...	166
Devils Incarnate	167
Sin hindered by Sin	167
The Devil a Bad Paymaster ...	168
Too near the Edge	169
A Great Crime and its Consequences	170

CHAPTER XLII.

Taking Counsel with God	171
Divine Guidance	171
Implicit Obedience	172
The Answer to Prayer delayed ...	173
The Blessedness of Patient Endurance	173
Contradictory Requirements ...	174
Inquiring of God in Great Crises ...	175
Carnal Predispositions	176
Dissembling in Prayer	176

Digitized by Google

THEME	PAGE
Man's Utter Dependence upon God ...	177
Waiting on the Divine Ordinance ...	178
Divine Comforts for those in Doubt and Fear	178
A Land to be avoided	179
Searching the Heart	179

CHAPTER XLIII.

Moral Causes of Unbelief	181
The Credulity of Unbelief... ...	181
Prophetic Stones	182
The Stones of Tahpanhes	183
Hearts set to do Evil	184
Building on the Sand	184
The View of a Prophet's Complete Work	184
The Visitation upon Egypt... ...	185

CHAPTER XLIV.

Warnings from the Past	186
Open Rebellion	187
Chastisement misinterpreted ...	188
The Limit of God's Forbearance ...	189
Sinful Vows	189
The Remnant of the Remnant ...	190
The Condition of Hardened Sinners Desperate	190
Credentials of Religion	191
The Danger of corrupting True Religion	192
Jeremiah's Last Sermon	192
The End of Jeremiah; or, Going Down in Clouds	193
The Mind of God towards Sin and Sinners	194
The Apparent Profitableness of Sin	196
Wretched Reasons for a Wrong Resolve	196
The Husband's Responsibility ...	197
A Severe Lesson unlearned ...	197
The Doom of those making sure of Safety in Egypt	197
Supposed and Real Reasons for Calamity	198
Watching over Men for Evil ...	199
Human and Divine Confidence ...	199

CHAPTER XLV.

The Grief of One Soul, and its Consolation	200
Divine Destruction	201
Self-Seeking	201
Baruch's Message; or, God's Consideration for his Servant	202

THEME	PAGE
Baruch; or, the Young Recruit reheartened	203
Ambition prohibited	204
Counsel and Comfort for the Man overcome with Bad Tidings ...	205

CHAPTER XLVI.

The Judgment of Egypt	212
Incurable Diseases	213
The Heifer and the Gadfly	213
The Judgment of the Nations ...	214
"Judgment" going on "from the House of God"...	215
Premature Glorying	215
The Terror of Sacrifice without its Blessing	217
The Real Cause of the Decline of Empires	218
Punishment not Destruction but Purification and Preservation ...	219
Correction but in Measure	220
Why the Valiant are swept away ...	220
God's Care of his own	220

CHAPTER XLVII.

The Judgment of the Philistines ...	223
The Sword of the Lord ...	224, 225
The Sorrow of the Ungodly ...	225
The Sword that cannot be Quiet ...	226
Apostrophe to the Sword	226

CHAPTER XLVIII.

The Judgment of Moab	233
The Dangers of Riches	234
Slack Service	234
"Wine on the Lees"	235
Pride	236, 242
The Ease of Moab ...	236, 245
Betrayed by their Gods	237
"The Heath in the Wilderness" ...	238
Doing the Work of the Lord deceitfully	238, 244
Much Ease, much Peril	239
Touching the Apple of God's Eye ...	241
The Departed Praise of Moab ...	243
The Consequence of a Wrong Confidence	243
Moab exulting over Fallen Israel ...	245
The Broken Vessel	246
No Ultimate Escape	246

CHAPTER XLIX.

Israel's Heirs	252
The Failure of Wisdom	253

Digitized by Google

THEME	PAGE
A Promise for Orphans and Widows	254
A People deceived by its own Terribleness	255
"Fear on Every Side"	255
The Paradox of Israel's Inheritance...	255
"Where is the Wise?"	256
Israel's Judgment an Argument for Edom's	257
The Unrest of the Wicked	257
Might not Right	257
Desirable Habitations: a New Year's Sermon	258
Consolation for a Father's Dying Bed	259
Vain Confidences	260
Lessons from the Sea ...	261, 267
The Fall of Damascus; or, the Lovely and the Lovable lost	263
A Usurper in the Inheritance ...	265
The Pride of Apparent Security ...	266
The Fate of Elam	267

CHAPTER L.

The Judgment of Babylon... ...	274
Returning Penitents	275
Lost Sheep	276
Perfect Forgiveness	276
The Strong Redeemer ...	277, 284
Israel's Deliverance	278
"To Zion, with their Faces thitherward"...	278
Israel as Lost Sheep	279
Divine Forgiveness an Absolute Oblivion	279
The Hammer broken	280
Godly Sorrow	280
Forgetting our Resting-Place ...	281
The Forgiveness of God	282
Hammer *versus* Hammer	283
The Liars' Sword	285
The Fall of Hell	285
Reunited Israel seeking Jehovah ...	286
The Wolf excusing himself ...	287
The Punishment of those who rejoice wrongly	287
The Feeding-Places of the Flock ...	288
A Vain Quest	288
The Sword everywhere	289
Capital Events in History	289

CHAPTER LI.

"Suffering, but not Forsaken" ...	295
Public Thanksgiving	295
God's Battle-Axe	296, 301
Flight from the City of Destruction	296
The Duty and Encouragement of the Saved	297
The Book cast into the River ...	298
Divine Love not to be severed from its Object	298
The Duty of Separating from the World	299
Praise the Outcome of Saintly Experience	299
"Escape for thy Life!"	299
The Response of the Redeemed ...	300
"The Portion of Jacob"	301
A Fatal Fact	302
Harvests of Horror and Threshings of Wrath	303
Joy over Judgment	304
The Charge to them that are Spared	304
"The Broad Walls"	304
The Weariness of Sin	305
Unforsaken Israel...	306
Individual Escape	306
Declaring in Zion the Work of the Lord	307
The Dwellers on Many Waters ...	307
The Resources of Jehovah	308
The Portion of Jacob contrasted with the Confidences of Babylon ...	309
The Destroying Mountain destroyed	309
Effeminacy	310
Making the Springs Dry	310
A Timely Recollection and its Practical Effect	311
Evil written in a Book	311
A Symbol of Irretrievable Loss ...	312

CHAPTER LII.

The Siege and Capture of Jerusalem	313
The Fate of Zedekiah ...	314, 316, 321
The Destruction of the Temple ...	314
Sparing the Poor	315
The Deliverance of Jehoiachin ...	316
The Lord creating Evil	316
The March of Doom	317
Days whose Duties are Indelible ...	318
Famine	319
The Irony of a Name	320
Zedekiah as King...	320
Zedekiah's Army scattered ...	321
A Great Burning	322

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THE

PULPIT COMMENTARY,

EDITED BY THE

REV. CANON H. D. M. SPENCE, M.A.,

VICAR AND RURAL DEAN OF ST. PANCRAS, AND EXAMINING CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER AND BRISTOL;

AND BY THE

REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, M.A.

LAMENTATIONS.

Exposition

By REV. T. K. CHEYNE, M.A., D.D.,

RECTOR OF TENDRING, AND LATE FELLOW OF BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXFORD.

Homiletics

By REV. W. F. ADENEY, M.A.

Homilies by Various Authors.

REV. PROF. J. R. THOMSON, M.A. REV. D. YOUNG, B.A.

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THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Book of Lamentations has no author's name attached to it in the Hebrew Bible, which, indeed, places it far away from Jeremiah in the so-called *K'thūbhīm* or Hagiographa, between Ruth and Kohéleth (Ecclesiastes). It is the Septuagint which, in some manuscripts, appends "of Jeremiah" to the descriptive title "Lamentations," at the same time grouping it with the prophecies of Jeremiah and the (apocryphal) Book of Baruch. But before we can form an opinion as to the justice of this view of the authorship, and the romantic tradition connected with it (see below), we must first of all take a general survey of the book and gather up all its internal evidence as to date and origin; and also we must illuminate this by the results of a critical study of the Old Testament.

One of the most interesting of these results is the discovery of a great lyric movement among the conquered Jews, as well those in Babylon as those who remained in their much-loved home. "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem," was their dominant thought, even when surrounded by the wonders of Babylonian art; and it naturally expressed itself in lyric verse. Ewald has done much to enable modern students to realize the vast debt which we owe to the Captivity and the subsequent period for much of the most precious part of the Psalms, and, by including his translation of the Lamentations in the same volume with the Psalter (he even inserts the former as a portion of the sacred hymn-book), he has brought vividly before us the essential unity of the great lyric movement referred to. We have spoken of these psalms and lamentations as expressions of a mood; they are this most truly; but they are something more. Nursed up on the writings of the prophets, the authors of these lyric poems were in a sense prophets, just as the prophetic writings addressed to the later Jews may to a certain extent be classed with the lyric literature. The truths which the lyric or elegiac poets had imbibed from the prophets gave a colour even to the expressions of grief, and so, monotonous as the Book of Lamentations may be, it has justly been admitted as a sacred Scripture into the Old Testament canon. The authorship of Jeremiah may be doubtful, and yet we cannot fail to

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recognize in this short elegiac book that peculiar quality which, in all its degrees of manifestation, the Jewish doctors agree with us in describing as inspiration.

The common theme of the Lamentations is the terrible fate which befell Jerusalem when the Chaldeans captured the city (B.C. 588) and carried away its inhabitants (less fortunate in one sense than those of the country districts) to Babylon. That they were all written at the same time is, however, to say the least, improbable; the third, and in a still higher degree the fifth, will be found to present some striking points of dissimilarity to the rest. Let us first of all endeavour to characterize the three which have most in common, and each of which begins with the word *ĕchāh*, how! viz. the first, the second, and the fourth. Even in this narrower group, indeed, some divergences will strike the reader, but they are not sufficient to compel us to assume a diversity of authorship. Each elegy is in the strictest sense alphabetical (which means that every verse or half-verse or every group of verses begins with one of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet; comp. Ps. ix., x., xxv., xxxiv., xxxvii., cxix., cxlv.), but with this difference—that whereas in the first the initial letters come in their usual order, in the second and fourth the letter פ (*pe*) precedes the letter ע (*ayin*).[1] Another unimportant technical divergence is that the verses of ch. i. and ii. are in the original, as a rule, composed of three lines, and those of ch. iv. of four. It may seem strange, at first sight, that so artificial a form as the alphabetic should have been selected for elegies. But further consideration will show that it was really both natural and appropriate. These elegies were probably not so much intended for private use as for a liturgical purpose, for which the alphabetic form, so convenient for the memory, would be a great recommendation. It has for ages been the custom to read the Lamentations in the synagogues on the ninth day of Ab, the anniversary of the burning of the temple, and, as this is a very ancient fast-day (Zech. vii. 3), it is reasonable to conjecture that the Lamentations, or some of them, were from the first designed for this solemn occasion. The didactic element which now and then appears in the poems gives an additional appropriateness to the alphabetic form, as a reference to the alphabetic psalms will at once show.

The contents of these three elegies, in spite of their monotony, indicate a certain difference in the point of view of the writer or writers. The first directs the attention to the sorrow-laden Mater Dolorosa (if the application suggested by a living poet may be allowed), the widowed city, Zion. The cause of the catastrophe is but lightly touched upon, and the description

[1] This is in itself not more surprising than other irregularities of Hebrew poets in the handling of alphabetic versification. What is surprising is that the same violation of order should be found in one of the psalms which there is no ground for assigning to the author (or to any of the authors) of the Lamentations. For there can hardly be a doubt that Hitzig, Delitzsch, and Bickell are right in transposing vers. 15 and 16 (Hebrew, 16, 17) of Ps. xxxiv. Let any one try the two modes of reading these verses together with the following verse, and judge for himself.

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cannot be said to maintain itself at the height of the opening verse. The second points out the true author of Zion's calamity; it is Jehovah, who has fulfilled his threats of old, and turned against his people like an angry warrior. The fourth has more touches than the rest which reveal (so far as picturesqueness of detail can be accepted as evidence) the hand of an eye-witness of the tragic events. The sufferings of various classes, due to God's anger at their sins, are affectingly described, and the malignant joy of the Edomites represented, not merely as a recollection (Ps. cxxxvii. 7), but as a present fact. The second and the fourth are generally considered the most striking of the elegies from a poetical point of view.

Before introducing the question of authorship, we have still to examine briefly the two remaining poems—the third and the fifth. The former agrees with the three elegies already considered in the technical respect of its alphabetic structure, and more particularly with the second and fourth (in the order of the chapters), inasmuch as the same two initial letters are transposed. It is, again, connected with the first and second by the subdivision of each of its verses into three lines. It differs, however, from all the other elegies in its peculiar exaggeration of the alphabetic form, since it not merely distinguishes a single verse by one of the Hebrew letters, but a whole triplet of verses. This evidently hampers the poet in the expression of his thoughts;—the third is the least rhythmical and the least poetical of all the Lamentations. In contents, too, it differs to a remarkable degree from the other elegies. Instead of describing the calamities of the nation, the writer points, or seems to point, to himself. "I am the man that hath seen affliction," he begins, and he continues to speak of himself as the great sufferer except in vers. 22—47, where he passes into a description of the circumstances of the nation, and only refers to himself as a member of the community ("Let us search and try our ways," etc.). His account of his own sufferings reminds us, by its highly coloured phraseology, of certain of the psalms which purport to be the utterances of an individual, but which contain many phrases which are hyperbolical in the mouth of an individual Israelite. In the case of this third Lamentation, as well as in that of this important group of psalms, we seem irresistibly driven to the inference that the writer (whether Jeremiah or another) adopts the *rôle* of a poetical representative of the Israelitish people, or at any rate of the pious believers who formed the kernel of that people.[1] This accounts for the curious alternation in ch. iii. of expressions which point to an individual Israelite with those which distinctly refer to the people, and for the seemingly extravagant character of the former, and also for the fondness which the author betrays for the great poem of Job, the hero of which is, in the intention of the writer (to be carefully distinguished from the intention of the traditional narrative), obviously a type of the righteous man in affliction.[2] Compare, for instance, ch. iii. 4 with Job xvi. 9, 10; ch. iii. 7, 9 with Job

[1] 'The Prophecies of Isaiah,' by the present writer, 2nd edit., vol. ii. pp. 188—190.

[2] Ibid., pp. 245—247.

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xix. 8; ch. iii. 8 with Job xxx. 20; ch. iii. 10 with Job x. 16; ch. iii. 12, 13 with Job vii. 20 and xvi. 12, 13; ch. iii. 14, 63 with Job xxx. 9.

And if the writer of ch. iii. at one point does fall out of his assumed *rôle*, this too has to some extent a parallel in Job, for both Job and his friends now and then "fall into language which implies that Job is not an individual, but plurality of persons." Neither poet was able to keep up the personification, or representative symbol, with entire consistency.

Before passing on to the second of the elegies reserved, we may, it would seem, draw one definite inference from the preceding data, viz. that the third chapter of Lamentations is not by the author of ch. i., ii., iv. A similar result is obtained by an examination of the elegy which forms the fifth chapter. Turning to the Hebrew text, we are at once met by the fact that, unlike the companion elegies, it is not alphabetical, *i.e.* it does not make each of its verses begin with one of the Hebrew letters. Still, there is an approximation to the alphabetic form; the number of its verses (which are two-lined) is the same as that of the Hebrew letters, viz. twenty-two (comp. Ps. xxxiii., xxxviii., ciii.) It seems as if the close observance of the canons of alphabetic versification were too great a restriction for the writer of this elegy, just as some of the greatest English sonneteers have felt the laws of the Italian sonnet confine their freedom of thought and expression unduly. The treatment of the subject is slightly varied in this elegy, which is little more than an enumeration of the insults heaped upon the Jews by their enemies. The poet speaks near the end of the elegy (ver. 20) as if this sad state of things had already continued a long time, from which it has generally been inferred that the poem was composed rather later than the rest of the collection. We must remember, however, that, as J. H. Newman says—

> ". . . time is not a common property;
> But what is long is short, and swift is slow,
> And near is distant, as received and grasped
> By this mind and by that, and every one
> Is standard of his own chronology."
>
> ('The Dream of Gerontius,' p. 23.)

To extreme grief, a few years might appear an age, and the short, simple sentences of which the poem consists have the ring of such genuine feeling, neither diluted by reflection nor overlaid by rhetoric, that we may well be reluctant to assume a very late date. They may conceivably have been improvised in the midst of persecution by one of the scanty remnant which remained in Judah even after the third deportation of exiles. Some of the writer's friends have sought refuge in Egypt (*i.e.* on the north-east frontier of Egypt, whither Jeremiah himself was carried by force, see Jer. xlii., xliv.); others have submitted to Assyria (a conventional term for the great Mesopotamian empire); the remainder of them are tyrannized over by upstarts of servile origin, such as many a modern Turkish pasha, placed over the land of Judah by the Babylonian suzerain. Yet so much relaxed are the bands of order, that savage, nomad tribes can venture to

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plunder them of their crusts of bread. Worse than all, Jerusalem is in ruins and uninhabited, and seems to have been so for an age, by the "pathetic fallacy" explained above.

We have seen that the fifth elegy in the collection can hardly be the work of the Prophet Jeremiah, who was probably already in Egypt when the poem was written. But we have also seen that, both in form and in contents, it differs from the other elegies, and we may now add that, linguistically, there is almost as little to connect it with its companions as with the Book of Jeremiah. The question, however, still remains whether at least some part of the Book of Lamentations (viz. either ch. i., ii., iv., or ch. iii. alone) may not be the composition of that gifted prophet.

Let us first of all consider the internal evidence, and let us test the theory of Jeremiah's authorship by its applicability to the third chapter of the book, as the part which, upon the face of it, can most easily be claimed as Jeremiah's. It will be readily admitted that, if we take the poem literally, it points to Jeremiah more distinctly than to any other known individual. The deep affection which the writer betrays for his people, his sensitive nature, and the bitter sufferings which he (apparently) describes himself to have undergone, correspond to peculiarities which we have already had to notice in the character and life of Jeremiah. Some of the characteristic expressions, thoughts, or images of Jeremiah's have also been pointed out in this chapter; compare, for instance, ch. iii. 47, 48 with Jer. iv. 6, 20, vi. 1, 14 ("breach" equivalent to "destruction"), ix. 1, xiii. 17, xiv. 17 (incessant tears); ch. iii. 64—66 with Jer. xi. 20 (appeal for vengeance). This comparison of expressions and ideas, however, is of very little worth. The parallels are but few in number, and, so far as they are valid (the last-quoted breaks down on examination), are easily accounted for on the theory of the writer's acquaintance with Jeremiah's prophecies, and they are altogether outweighed by the numerous expressions never found in the Book of Jeremiah (such will be found in all but three verses of the third chapter of Lamentations). As to the general suitability of this prolonged monologue to the character and life of the prophet, we need only refer to what has been said already in the Introduction to the Book of Jeremiah. Considering what a large body of literature there is, in which the spirit and even the expressions of Jeremiah may be recognized (*e.g.*, besides Lamentations, Deuteronomy, Kings, Job, Isa. xl.—lxvi., and certain of the psalms), it would be rash in the extreme to refer any part of it to that much-imitated prophet. There is certainly no direct statement in this elegy which compels us to regard either Jeremiah or any other prophet as the author.

The case for ascribing the remaining elegies to Jeremiah is proportionally weaker. There are, no doubt, expressions and ideas familiar to us in Jeremiah. Compare *e.g.* ch. i. 2, 19 with Jer. xxx. 14; ch. i. 11 with Jer. xv. 19; ch. i. 16 and ii. 11 with Jer. ix. 1, etc.; ch. i. 15 with Jer. xiv. 17 and xlvi. 11; ch. ii. 14 and iv. 13—15 with Jer. v. 30, 31 and xiv. 13, 14; ch. ii. 11, 13, iii. 47, 48, and iv. 10 with Jer. iv. 6, 20 and xiv. 17, etc.

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But these, again, are far outweighed by the expressions unknown to Jeremiah, which occur in almost every verse of these elegies (see the lists in Naegelsbach's 'Jeremiah,' Introduction, § 3), and at least three passages militate rather strongly against the authorship of that prophet, viz. ch. ii. 9 (where the writer regards the cessation of prophetic visions as a misfortune, contrast Jeremiah's denunciations in Jer. xxiii.); iv. 17 (where the writer speaks of having formerly expected help from Egypt, contrast Jer. ii. 18, 36); and iv. 20 (where Zedekiah is spoken of respectfully and hopefully as Jeremiah can hardly be supposed to have done).

The external evidence for the authorship of Jeremiah consists of a tradition, accepted, perhaps, by Josephus ('Antiquities,' x. 5, 1), and certainly by the Talmud ('Baba Bathra,' fol. 15, col. 1) and the later Jewish and Christian scholars. The earliest authority for it is a statement prefixed to the Septuagint (and repeated with a few additional words in the Vulgate) in the following terms:—"And it came to pass, after Israel was taken captive, and Jerusalem made desolate, that Jeremias sat weeping, and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said." This cannot, however, have formed part of the Hebrew text of Lamentations, else the Massoretic editors of the text (who beyond reasonable doubt believed Jeremiah to be the author of the book) would certainly have handed it on to us. It has, indeed, been suggested that the compiler of Chronicles attributed the book to Jeremiah, because he reports that "Jeremiah lamented for Josiah," and that his words (apparently) "are written in the Lamentations" (2 Chron. xxxv. 25) If this view is correct, the compiler of Chronicles interpreted the words, "the breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord" (ch. iv. 20), which really refer to Zedekiah, of Josiah. The view is not to be hastily rejected, although it is also possible that the statement in the Septuagint is due to a misinterpretation of the passage in Chronicles. In any case, the tradition cannot be traced up to the time of Jeremiah, and is too evidently fictitious—first, because Jeremiah was not an eye-witness of the sad circumstances described in the Lamentations; and secondly, because, even if he had been so, such a tender-hearted man (whose prophetic utterance is almost stifled by tears) cannot be imagined as amusing himself, amid the ruins of Jerusalem, with inditing these highly artificial, not to say rhetorical, compositions in a style absolutely new to him. No; poems like these cannot have been produced till the worst misery of conquest had been partly mitigated by time. They are (from a literary point of view) the efforts of highly educated men to relieve their feelings by the help of art. They are more than this, no doubt; they are an evidence of the working of the Spirit of God on the minds of the more spiritually minded Jews, leading them to contrition and repentance. But we must before all things adopt a purely literary point of view in an inquiry as to date and authorship, and then we cannot but recognize that the first four Lamentations (which are alone now in question) are too elaborately artificial to have been the work of "Jeremiah sitting amid the ruins of Jerusalem." There is genuine feeling in them, however, only it has

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already been softened by time. To assert, with Dean Plumptre, that the born poet "accepts the discipline of a self-imposed law just *in proportion* to the vehemence of his emotions," is incapable of proof from modern European poetry, and, if possible, still more opposed to the facts of Hebrew literature Some of the examples which the dean adduces are merely the rhetorical exercises of poets learning their craft; others merely concessions to the taste which every now and then prevails for superfine elaboration in every branch of art; others, again (and these few examples are alone in point), the attempts of the artists to help Nature to recover her balance, when the recovery has already begun and emotion has already lost its overwhelming vehemence. Members of the much-suffering Jewish race have many a time, since the Lamentations were written, had recourse for comfort to similar styles of composition, and verified the words of a great French critic, "When the passion is sincere, even the most artificial form assumes something of beauty."

Before we conclude, let us briefly review our position. The first, second, and fourth chapters of Lamentations may conceivably be by the same author; and though that author is certainly not Jeremiah, yet he is probably acquainted, whether by the ear or by the eye, with the prophecies of Jeremiah. He was contemporary with the fall of Jerusalem, and indited these elegies not long after for a liturgical purpose. It is, however, equally possible that they are the work of different authors, belonging to the same circle or school of literary craftsmen. About the same time, or a little later, the fifth and last seems to have been written, and very certainly not by the author of any of the foregoing Lamentations. The date of the third elegy may have been as early as that of the others, or it may have been written at some later time;—the personification of the people is thought by many critics to be a characteristic of those quiet literary men among the Jewish exiles in Babylon, to one of whom they attribute most if not all of the second part of the Book of Isaiah. In any case the author of the third Lamentation must have been acquainted with the other elegies (except the fifth), as there is a general similarity in the diction of the first four chapters of the book.[1] There seems, in fact, to have been a peculiar and fixed vocabulary, traditional in this school of elegiac poets, just as there has been in other schools of writers. Jeremiah was probably the favourite book of these poets (next to the Psalter, so far as this book was in existence); and so, if a title must be given by way of defining the authorship, we might, perhaps, style the entire book, on the analogy of a portion of the Psalter, "The Book of the Lamentations of the sons of Jeremiah."

The elegies on which we have been engaged were the forerunners of a large body of synagogue poetry; many of the *kīnōth* (as one large class of the post-canonical as well as the five canonical elegies were called) were suggested by passages of the Book of Lamentations. Most of them, indeed,

[1] See the third section of the Introduction to Naegelsbach's 'Commentary on Lamentations,' appended to the same writer's 'Jeremiah' in Lange's Old Testament series (translated).

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were specially written for that very fast-day which we have already conjectured to have occasioned the composition of the canonical Lamentations. The most beautiful of the *kīnōth* is probably that of Yehuda ben Samuel Halevi (twelfth century A.D.), which may be known even to some general readers by Heinrich Heine's poem in the 'Romanzero,' and which has been critically illustrated by A. von Oettingen, 'Die synagogale Elegik des Volkes Israel u. s. w.' (Dorpat, 1853), with which may be compared Delitzsch's delightful and instructive work, 'Zur Geschichte der jüdischen Poesie.' Lastly, for a comprehensive article on the Hebrew elegy (in its Biblical forms) see a paper by Professor C. Budde, of Bonn, which opens the second volume (1882) of Stade's *Zeitschrift* for Old Testament studies.

For the exegetical and critical literature on Lamentations, we need only refer to the list of works on Jeremiah in Vol. I, adding, however, Bickell, 'Carmina Veteris Testamenti Metricè,' Innsbruck, 1882 (a critically revised text of the chief poetical passages in the Old Testament, more to be trusted in the Lamentations than in the Psalms); Plumptre, 'Jeremiah and Lamentations,' in vol. iv. of Bishop Ellicott's 'Commentary,' London, 1884 (a truly popular and interesting work by a many-sided scholar).

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THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I.

Vers. 1—11.—A WAIL OF DISTRESS FOR JERUSALEM.

Vers. 1, 2.—The fate of Jerusalem is described in language which resembles here and there that used in Isaiah of fallen Babylon (Isa. xlvii. 1, 8). It is probably the finest passage in the whole book, and has inspired some grand lines in Mr. Swinburne's picture of the republican *mater dolorosa*—

"Who is she that sits by the way, by the wild wayside,
In a rust-stained garment, the robes of a cast-off bride,
In the dust, in the rainfall, sitting with soiled feet bare,
With the night for a garment upon her, with torn, wet hair," etc.?

Ver. 1.—**How.** The characteristic introductory word of an elegy (comp. Isa. i. 21; xiv. 4, 12), and adopted by the early Jewish divines as the title of the Book of Lamentations. It is repeated at the opening of ch. ii. and ch. iv. **Sit solitary.** Jerusalem is poetically personified and distinguished from the persons who accidentally compose her population. She is "solitary," not as having retired into solitude, but as deserted by her inhabitants (same word as in first clause of Isa. xxvii. 10). How **is she become as a widow!** etc. Rather, *She is become a widow that was great among the nations; a princess among the provinces, she is become a vassal.* The alteration greatly conduces to the effect of the verse, which consists of three parallel lines, like almost all the rest of the chapter. We are not to press the phrase, "a widow," as if some earthly or heavenly husband were alluded to; it is a kind of symbol of desolation and misery (comp. Isa. xlvii. 8). "The provinces" at once suggests the period of the writer, who must have been a subject of the Babylonian empire. The term is also frequently used of the countries under the Persian rule (*e.g.* Esth. i. 1, 22), and in Ezra ii. 1 and Neh. vii. 6 is used of Judah itself. Here, however, the "provinces," like the "nations," must be the countries formerly subject to David and Solomon (comp. Eccles. ii. 8).

Ver. 2.—**In the night.** Not only by day, but even in the season of rest and unconsciousness. **Her lovers . . . her friends**; *i.e.* the neighbouring peoples, with which Judah had formed alliances, such as Egypt (Jer. ii. 36), Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon (Jer. xxvii. 3). This is a favourite phrase of Jeremiah's (comp. Jer. iii. 1; iv. 30; xxii. 20, 22; xxx. 14), but also of Hosea (ii. 5, 7, 10, 12, 13; viii. 9) and Ezekiel (xvi. 33, 36, 37; xxiii. 5, 9, 22). The national God was conceived of as the Husband of the nation; and the prophets retained this idea and elevated it, just as they did circumcision and many other Eastern traditions.

Ver. 3.—**Is gone into captivity because of affliction**; rather, *is gone into exile*, etc. The poet is not thinking of the deportation of the captives, but of those Jews who sought refuge for themselves in foreign lands (comp. Jer. xl. 11). An objection has been raised to this view that the number of fugitive Jews would not be large enough to warrant their being called "Judah." But we might almost as well object on a similar ground to the application of the term "Judah" to the Jews who were carried to Babylon. The truth may, perhaps, be that, after the fall of Jerusalem, the Jewish nation became split up into three parts: (1) the Jews who succeeded in escaping into Egypt or elsewhere; (2) those who were carried captive; (3) the mass of the common people, who remained on their native soil. Keil, however, retains the view of the Authorized Version, only substituting

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"out of" for "because of." "Out of" the misery into which the Jews had been brought by the invasions of Necho and Nebuchadnezzar they passed into the new misery of captivity. **Among the heathen**; rather, *among the nations*. **Between the straits.** The phrase is peculiar, and reminds us of Ps. cxviii. 5, "Out of the strait I called unto thee." "A strait," or narrow place, clearly means adversity, just as "a large place" (Ps. cxviii. 5) means prosperity.

Ver. 4.—**The ways of Zion do mourn.** The roads leading to Jerusalem, usually so thronged with pilgrims, are desolate and "mourn" (comp. ch. ii. 8 and Isa. iii. 26; xiv. 31). **All her gates are desolate.** No one goes in or out of Jerusalem, and there is no concourse of citizens in the shady recess of the gates. **The virgins are afflicted.** So Zeph. iii. 18. The sorrow was on account of the cessation of the festival, in the music of which they took a leading part (comp. Ps. lxviii. 25).

Ver. 5.—**Are the chief**; rather, *are become the head*. Comp. Deut. xxviii. 44, where, as a part of the curse of Israel's rebellion, it is foretold that "he [the stranger] shall become the head, and thou shalt become the tail." **Before the enemy.** Like a herd of cattle.

Ver. 6.—**Beauty**; rather, *glory*. **Like harts that find no pasture**; and therefore have no strength left to flee. An allusion to the attempted flight of Zedekiah and his companions (Jer. xxxix. 4, 5).

Ver. 7.—**Remembered**; rather, *remembereth*. **Miseries.** The Hebrew is difficult, and perhaps means *wanderings*. **At her sabbaths**; rather, *at her extinguishment*. The word has nothing to do with the sabbaths; indeed, a reference to these would have been rather misplaced; it was no subject of wonder to the Babylonians that the Jews celebrated a weekly day of rest, as they had one of their own (*sabattu*).

Ver. 8.—**Therefore she is removed**; rather, *she is become an abomination* (literally, *an impurity*; comp. Lev. xv. 19). The poet leaves out the preliminary clause, "therefore she is grievously punished." It was the humiliation of Jerusalem, rather than her sin, which brought upon her the contempt of her neighbours. The destruction of a city is often compared to the ill treatment of a defenceless woman (Isa. xlvii. 3; Nah. iii. 5).

Ver. 9.—**She remembereth not**, etc.; rather, *she thought not upon*, etc. An allusion to Isa. xlvii. 7. **O Lord, behold**, etc. This is the language in which the "sigh" (ver. 8) finds expression.

Ver. 10.—**Her pleasant things**; or, *her precious things*; that is, the treasures of the palaces of Jerusalem (2 Chron. xxxvi. 19), and still more those of the temple (2 Chron. xxxvi. 10); comp. Isa. lxiv. 11). **For she hath seen**; rather, *yea, she hath seen*. **The heathen entered**, etc. In Deut. xxiii. 3 only the Ammonites and Moabites are excluded from religious privileges; but in Ezek. xliv. 9 the prohibition is extended to all foreigners.

Ver. 11.—**All her people sigh**, etc. The sufferings of Jerusalem did not come to an end at the capture of the city. Some think that this verse relates solely to the miserable survivors. This is possible; at any rate, it includes the contemporaries of the writer. "Sigh" and "seek" are participles in the Hebrew. **To relieve the soul**; literally, *to bring back the soul*. The "soul," *i.e.* the principle of life, is conceived of as having for a time deserted the fainting frame. **See, O Lord**, etc. Another piteous cry of Jerusalem, preparing the way for the second half of the elegy.

Vers. 12—22.—The same subject; Jerusalem the speaker.

Ver. 12.—**Is it nothing to you?** The Hebrew is very difficult, and the translation therefore insecure. Keil, however, adopts a rendering very near that of the Authorized Version "(Cometh it) not unto you?" *i.e.* "Do ye not heed it?" Ewald supposes the phrase to be abbreviated from "Do I not call unto you?" (comp. Prov. viii. 4); but this would be a very harsh construction. The Septuagint has Οὐ πρὸς ὑμᾶς; the Targum, "I adjure you;" the Vulgate, *O vos*;—all apparently pronouncing *lū* instead of *lō*. At any rate, the object of the words is to heighten the force of the appeal which follows.

Ver. 13.—Three figures—fire, a net, sickness, for the calamities which have come upon Jerusalem. **From above**; *i.e.* from heaven. **Spread a net for my feet, as though I were a wild beast** (comp. Jer. xviii. 22). **Turned me back.** The consequence of being entangled in the net was that he could go no further, but fell into the hands of his pursuers.

Ver. 14.—**Is bound . . . are wreathed.** The transgressions of Jerusalem are likened to a heavy yoke. So numerous are they that they are said to be "wreathed," or twisted together, like ropes. **Into their hands.** The Hebrew has simply "into hands;" following a suggestion of the Septuagint. Budde would read, "Into the hands of adversaries."

Ver. 15.—**Hath trodden under foot**; rather, *hath rejected*; i.e. hath punished. Comp. Ps. cxix. 118, 119, where "thou rejectest [same verb as here] all them that wander from thy statutes" is followed by "thou puttest away all the ungodly of the earth like dross." **Hath called an assembly**;

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rather, *hath proclaimed a festival.* When Jehovah summons the instruments of his vengeance, the prophets describe it as the "proclaiming a festival." The Persians or Chaldeans, as the case may be, obey the summons with a holy glee, and destroy the enemies of the true God (comp. Isa. xiii. 3). **Hath trodden,** etc.; rather, *hath trodden the winepress for* (i.e. to the ruin of) *the virgin daughter of Zion.* The poet carries on the figure of the festival. It is a vintage which is to be celebrated, such a vintage as is described in Isa. lxiii. 3 (comp. Joel iii. 13). The choicest youth of Judah are to be cut off like grapes from the vine. "Virgin daughter" is a frequent figure to express inviolate security (so Jer. xiv. 17).

Ver. 16.—**For these things,** etc. After the reflections of vers. 13—15, the poet gives vent anew to his bitter grief. **Mine eye, mine eye.** A repetition quite in Jeremiah's manner; comp. Jer. iv. 19; vi. 14 (repeated viii. 11); xxii. 29; xxiii. 25. The Septuagint and Vulgate, however, have "mine eye" only once. **Relieve my soul** (see on ver. 11).

Ver. 17.—Again the poet passes into the tone of reflection, thus relieving the strain upon the feelings of the reader. **Spreadeth forth her hands.** The gesture of supplication and entreaty (comp. Ps. xxviii. 2; lxiii. 4; Isa. lxv. 2). **That his adversaries,** etc.; rather, *those who are about him are his adversaries.* The neighbouring peoples, who ought to be sympathetic and friendly, gloat over the spectacle of his calamities. They both hate and (comp. ver. 8) despise the fallen city.

Ver. 18.—**People**; render, *peoples.*

Ver. 19.—**For my lovers**; render, *to my lovers* (see on ver. 2).

Ver. 20.—**My bowels.** The vital parts, especially the heart, as the seat of the affections, like σπλάγχνα. **Are troubled**; literally, *are made to boil.* So Job xxx. 27, "My bowels boil" (a different word, however). **Is turned**; or, *turns itself*; i.e. palpitates violently. **At home** there is **as death.** So Jer. ix. 21, "For death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces." By "death," when distinguished, as here, from "the sword," pestilence is meant; so *e.g.* in Jer. xv. 2; xliii. 11. But the poet says here, not that "there is death," but merely "*as* death," *i.e.* a mild form of pestilence, not the famine-typhus itself. Or, perhaps, he means "every form of death" (Virgil's "plurima mortis imago").

Ver. 21.—**Thou wilt bring.** The Hebrew has, "Thou hast brought;" it is the perfect of prophetic certitude, which represents an event certainly foreseen as if it had already taken place. Ewald, however, takes this to be the precative, a variety of the perfect which certainly exists in Arabic, but has not been quite satisfactorily shown to exist in Hebrew (see Driver, 'Hebrew Tenses,' § 20 [13]). **The day that thou hast called**; *i.e.* foretold by the prophets (comp. Jer. xxv. 17—26). But very probably we should read, with the Septuagint, "Thou wilt bring the day; thou wilt call the fit time."

Ver. 22.—**For my sighs are many.** This is not mentioned as the reason why God should punish Jerusalem's enemies; we ought rather to understand, either from ver. 20, "Behold, my distress;" or simply, "Deliver me."

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*The solitary city.* The first elegy on the desolation of Jerusalem opens with a lament over her solitariness, widowhood, and humiliation.

I. THE SOLITARINESS. 1. *How it is to be measured.* (1) *By the nature of the place.* It is a city that is solitary. A deserted town strikes us as more lonely than the most dreary moor. We do not expect people in a wilderness; we look for them in a city. Streets which never echo to a footfall, windows which never brighten with a face, doors which are never opened, houses, palaces, shops, factories, markets, all silent and empty,—this is indeed a picture of desolation. It is contrary to experience, expectation, and purpose. (2) *By the former condition of the place.* It used to be populous. Jerusalem was no sleepy old provincial town, but a busy capital. Crowds would throng the streets, little children play, and old men stand gossiping at the corners, and hucksters set up their stalls, where now no live creature is to be seen, save, perhaps, a few lean dogs prowling after their unclean food. The contrast of the past thus aggravates the distress of the present. 2. *Why it is most sad.* The loss of men is the great trouble. Fine buildings have been thrown down, marble statues broken, gold and precious stones stolen. But these are not the worst evils. Had all remained untouched, still the trouble would have been heart-rending. The people are gone! Chicago rises out of her ashes in greater splendour because her people remain. Jerusalem is most desolate because her citizens have been carried into captivity. The strength of a city is its population. The power

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of a nation is in its people. The vigour of a Church is in its membership. A splendid cathedral, with a rich full service, but no congregation, fails in comparison with the homeliest mission, if the latter gathers the people. Doctrine may be sound and "means of grace" abundant, yet we shall not advance except as we hold the people.

II. WIDOWHOOD. Unintentionally and perhaps unconsciously, the inspired poet uses an illustration to describe the desolate condition of Jerusalem, which may serve as a hint of her deeper distress. "She is become as a *widow*." Who had been her husband? The favoured city used to be regarded as the mystic bride of the Eternal. She had often been accused of unfaithfulness to her marriage vows. Now the faithless wife is punished by becoming the miserable widow. Jerusalem loses the presence and favour of God. It is said that the Shechinah was seen there no more. The greatest loss is to be bereft of God. They who are unfaithful to God will find that he will forsake them. Many would retain the privilege of blessings from God, while renouncing the obligation of fidelity to God. The unfaithful wife is loth to lose the support and position contributed to her by her husband. But this inconsistency cannot be allowed. Christ the Bridegroom remains faithful. But if his bride, the Church, dishonours his Name, she will lose her Lord and become as a widow.

III. HUMILIATION. The city had been the princess among the provinces. She now not only loses her dependencies; she loses her own independence; she becomes a vassal to a strange city. Humiliation will be the peculiar punishment of the great who abuse their rank. The doom of pride will be shame. Few troubles are more galling than to have to come down openly in the sight of those over whom a certain superiority had been maintained. 1. *Loss of position and character results in loss of influence.* When the Church falls, her power over the world will disappear. Christian elevation of character is essential to Christian influence among men. 2. *Loss of power entails loss of liberty.* Jerusalem weakened and conquered becomes a vassal. Only the strong can be free. Spiritual failings lead to the loss of spiritual liberty. 3. *When the Church ceases to influence the world she will become subject to the world.* The fallen suzerain becomes a vassal. The Church can only retain her liberty by maintaining her supremacy. This is the great truth the abuse of which has led to the monstrous pretensions of Rome. The lawful supremacy of the Church must be spiritual, and this may be lost and the Church subject to the spirit of the world, even while she is greedily grasping after temporal power, perhaps just because she does hanker after this lower advantage.

Ver. 2.—*Comfortless.* In her distress Jerusalem looks for comfort to those neighbouring nations which flattered her during her prosperity and behaved then as "lovers;" but she is disappointed in finding that they all desert her in the hour of her need.

I. IT IS NATURAL TO SEEK FOR COMFORT IN ADVERSITY FROM THE FRIENDSHIPS OF PROSPERITY. Jerusalem had her "lovers." This fact throws a significant light on the statement that she had "become as a widow" (ver. 1). What shame that she, the wife of the Eternal, should have to be spoken to of "lovers"! But having them she must find her comfort in them. She dare not look to her husband for comfort. In plainer language, the Jews had adopted the idolatry of neighbouring nations as well as renounced the exclusive and retiring position which had been required of them by their God. It was fitting that they should find their consolation from the Babylonian invasion in these foreign connections and religions. If we let our business, our pleasure, our ambition, or any other earthly thing usurp the place of God in our hearts, the time will come when we shall have to try what help we can get in trouble from our idol.

II. UNWORTHY CONNECTIONS WILL AFFORD NO COMFORT IN TIMES OF TROUBLE. The lovers are for pleasure; adversity dismisses them. How bitter is the disappointment! how mortifying is the revelation! The true husband could have been depended on, but the bad lovers for whom he was forsaken coldly turn from the piteous pleading of the sufferer. Thus must it be with every one who forsakes the one Friend and Comforter. No other balm of Gilead will heal the broken heart. What can the pleasures of society say to one who has failed and disgraced himself? What consolation can a materialistic philosophy whisper in the ears of the mourner by the grave? How will the science of the history of religion smooth the pillow of the dying man?

III. THE LAST DROP OF THE BITTER CUP IS TO BE COMFORTLESS. Mere formal consoling is a weariness when it is not an insult to grief. But the comfort of sympathy, the

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soothing of love, and the cheering of congenial companionship are Divine remedies for sorrow. They are lights in the gloom, though they do not bring the day; gentle hands to wipe away the tears, the flowing of which they may not be able to stanch. The most desolate picture is that of one like Jerusalem in this elegy, weeping sore in the night, with no friendly ray to break the darkness, and no one to remove the tears that fall upon the cheeks unheeded and neglected, crying for comfort only to the pitiless silence. 1. Let us learn to dwell in faithfulness with God, that we may enjoy his unfailing sympathy. 2. Let us extend hands of brotherly compassion to the sorrowing, that, whatever be the grief, its last anguish may be spared; and then, through human comfort, we may lead up to the Divine consolations.

Ver. 4.—*The abandoned feasts.* Jerusalem was the religious centre of the nation. Thither the tribes came up to present themselves before the Lord. Great assemblies and joyous feasts were held there for the benefit of all the Jews. But after the Babylonian destruction all this was suspended. None now came to the solemn feasts. The high-roads which were wont to be thronged with pilgrims mourn for the lack of travellers; the gates through which they used to press are unused; priests sigh with weariness and distress, having no glad offerings to present; and the virgins who led the song and dance in honour of God are smitten with affliction.

I. IT IS A CALAMITY FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP TO CEASE. Some regard public worship as an onerous duty and others as a superfluous infliction. But they who enter into the privileges of it heartily and spiritually know that it is a boon to the worshipper. As the sabbath is made for man, so also is the institution of worship. To be deprived of it is to suffer loss. 1. The loss of the *joy of worship.* There is a gladness in expressing love to earthly friends which should be found in the outpouring of our devotion to God. To mingle with the song of the angels is to taste the joy of the angels. 2. The loss of *the elevating influence of worship.* The soul rises on the wings of its own prayer. Worship is aspiration, and aspiration elevates. If we never worship we stagnate in worldliness. True worship is spiritual and may be enjoyed most in private. But public worship greatly helps this spiritual worship with most people. 3. The loss of the *social influence of worship.* Public worship affords mutual help in worship. Numbers give warmth and life to it.

II. IT IS A CALAMITY FOR JOYOUS FESTIVALS TO CEASE. The loss is twofold. 1. The loss of *the joy itself.* The gladness of worship is no small part of the brightness of a devout man's life. Rob him of this, and you darken his sky. There are clouds enough; we cannot afford to lose the sunlight which pierces and sometimes illumines them. 2. The loss of *the influence of the joy.* (1) This joy purifies. It keeps out unholy pleasures by satisfying the soul with its own blessedness. (2) This joy strengthens. In gladness we can serve God most earnestly. If, then, the unavoidable loss of joyous exercises of religion is a calamity, how great is the error of those who voluntarily convert religion into a thing of gloom!

III. IT IS A CALAMITY FOR RELIGIOUS INTERCOURSE BETWEEN MEN TO CEASE. The festival was an occasion for the meeting of Jews from all quarters. Townsmen met countrymen. Herdsmen from the south met agriculturists from the north. When this assembly was interrupted, the people suffered in many respects. 1. The loss of *brotherly association.* We are tempted to forget our brethren if we cease to see them. Solitary Christians tend to become selfish Christians. Brotherly sympathy is fostered by brother-fellowship. 2. The loss of *mutual stimulus.* The strong would urge on the weak, and the more spiritual inspire the less spiritual. There were prophets in these assemblies. 3. The loss of the *breadth of variety.* We become narrow by isolation. Intercourse broadens us. Christians should seek opportunities to meet with their fellow-Christians, to gain width and liberality of view.

Ver. 6.—*Her beauty departed from Zion.* I. ZION HAD A BEAUTY OF HER OWN. The dwellings of Zion shone splendid in cedar and gold. A softer beauty was shed over her from old memories and tender associations. The spiritual Zion has her beauty. It is not the magnificence of marble columns and gilded decorations. The beauty of Zion is the beauty of her worship and life. 1. *The beauty of holiness.* Purity is beautiful as impurity is ugly. This high spiritual loveliness is like the glory of God. 2. *The*

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beauty of love. Zion was the place where the tribes assembled. Here all jealousies were to be laid aside and all quarrels healed. What is more beautiful than concession and forgiveness? This beauty should characterize the Church of Christ. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" etc. (Ps. cxxxiii.). 3. *The beauty of joy.* Zion was the centre of festive gatherings. The sacred hill used to echo with shouts of gladness; it was enlivened with the timbrel and song of happy maidens. The joy of Divine grace imparts a sweetness to the very countenance of the faithful servant of God.

II. ZION LOST HER BEAUTY. The fine city was sacked by ruthless soldiers; the splendid edifices rifled or fired; the pomp and pageantry dissipated by sword and axe. But the higher beauty of Zion was also lost, and lost before she was robbed of her external grandeur. Her holiness was corrupted. Sin destroys the spiritual beauty of the Christian. His white priestly garments are defiled when he descends into the mire of moral degradation. It is not only that sin will be visited with certain definite pains and penalties. Before that happens there is an indescribable loss in the tarnished character and marred beauty of the soul which, to one who is awake to the evil condition into which he has fallen, must be a shame and grief.

III. THE LOSS OF THE BEAUTY OF ZION WAS A MOURNFUL CALAMITY. This beauty is no idle ornament, to be put off and on at the caprice of the wearer and for objects of idle display. It is the pledge of her King's favour, the inspiration of her own best life, and the secret of her influence. 1. *Health is lost.* As when the sunlight which flashes on silvery lakes and mountain snows fades away, the chills and mists of night creep over the valley, so, when the glory of God departs from a soul, coldness, darkness, and death take its place. 2. *Influence is lost.* Christians are to be the light of the world. Losing their brightness, they cease to draw others to Christ. The fair countenance of the bride of Christ wins many guests to the wedding feast. Let her see that it is not marred, lest her Lord be dishonoured.

Ver. 7.—*Pleasant things in the days of old.* I. IN TIMES OF TROUBLE WE CALL TO MIND THE PLEASANT THINGS IN THE DAYS OF OLD. 1. *There have been pleasant things in the days of old.* Few lives, if any, are wholly joyless from cradle to grave. There are rifts in the clouds of the darkest lot. Indeed, for most of us, the pleasant things far outnumber the painful. 2. *These pleasant things are too often undervalued when in our possession.* The fact that they may become subjects of fond and sad regret should lead us to take more account of them while they are with us. Let us not add to the lamentations of the loss of them remorse for an ungrateful and depreciatory treatment of them. 3. *Trouble calls up the recollection of these pleasant things.* (1) It does this because it leads to reflection. We may observe a great contrast between the intellectual effects of joy and sorrow. Joy is usually thoughtless, sorrow meditative. When joy does stimulate the intellect, it urges it to look forward and inspires hope; but sorrow turns its gaze backward and contemplates the past. 2. It does this by the force of contrast. One experience suggests the thought of its opposite. Darkness makes us dream of light, silence of music, pain of joy. 4. *Such recollections are likely to exaggerate the pleasantness of the past.* Memory is not an even mirror. It is warped by prejudice and emotion. When we regret the loss of past happiness, we exalt that happiness in memory above what it ever was in experience. Unconsciously we drop the vexations out of notice. We remember the fine view, and forget the weary climb that preceded the enjoyment of it. The roses of a regretful memory have no thorns. The soft evening lights spread a glamour over the past which gilds its plain features and softens its rugged form and hides its ugly defects in a delicious haze of dreamy melancholy.

II. RECOLLECTIONS OF PLEASANT THINGS IN THE DAYS OF OLD EXAGGERATE THE DISTRESS OF TIMES OF TROUBLE. On the whole, it may be, life is prosperous. The balance is in favour of the pleasant things. But we cannot take life in the lump. We consume it piecemeal; and that portion which is with us at each moment is for us the life itself—the whole life. Our real living is in the present. It is true that "we look before and after," and hope may greatly lighten the burden of the present, but only by coming into the present as the twilight of dawn enters the world before sunrise—a real light. 1. This fact helps us *to see a more even equalizing of lots than is obvious at*

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first. If man is born to trouble, he who seems at one time to have an unfair advantage will have to pay for it by the keener suffering of his adversity when that comes. 2. This fact should *warn us against the folly of enjoying the present without preparing for the future.* The more heartily we enjoy earthly treasures the worse will be our distress if we have no treasure in heaven to inherit. 3. *It is foolish to yield to fond regrets of the pleasant things in the days of old.* The past cannot be recalled. Let it die. The future is ours. The west will not brighten again with a return of the fading glow of sunset, but a new day will break in the east. 4. We may call to mind the happy things in days of old, not to increase our present distress, *but to encourage hope.* The sun did shine, then it may shine again. God is the same now as ever. If he blessed in the past he can bless in the future. Former mercies encourage us to hope for better things still to come.

Ver. 12.—*Sorrow unequalled, yet unheeded.* Jerusalem sits alone in her unparalleled grief, and the bitterness of it is intensified by the pitiless disregard of spectators. Bedouins of the desert pitch their tents in sight of her ruined towers, and merchants passing north and south see her deserted streets, and yet all gaze unmoved at the heart-rending picture.

I. THE SORROW WAS UNEQUALLED. 1. *Never was city more favoured than Jerusalem.* She was the chosen seat of Divine grace. In her temple stood God's mercy-seat. High privileges of revelation and spiritual blessings descended on her sons and daughters. The loss of these privileges brought a distress that men who had never enjoyed them could not feel. They who have tasted of the heavenly gift will find the outer darkness more terrible than those who have had no anticipation of the joys of the wedding feast. Apostate Christians will suffer agonies which the heathen and godless will not have to endure. 2. *Never was city more loved than Jerusalem.* This city of sacred memories and tender associations was dear to the hearts of her inhabitants. Her overthrow brought a grief that was proportionate to this love. The most fatal wound is one aimed at the heart. We are pained most cruelly when we are wounded in affection. What grief can be greater than that of parents for ruined children, and especially when the parents' sin has been the children's temptation? 3. *Never was city more visited by Divine wrath than Jerusalem.* Here is the secret of her deepest trouble. She is afflicted in the day of God's fierce anger. God is most angry with her because she has sinned against most light, most ungratefully, and most rebelliously.

II. THE SORROW WAS UNHEEDED. It would be thought that such unequalled grief would arrest the attention of the most hasty and strike pity into the hardest. But no; it seems that all will pass by with cold and stony indifference. 1. *Note the causes of this indifference.* (1) *Callousness.* Men look with the eye who do not feel with the heart. The very sight of misery often encountered hardens men's sensibilities. (2) *Selfishness.* People are self-absorbed. Sympathy requires effort, attention, self-renunciation. It costs more than the selfish will give. (3) *Contempt.* The worst trouble of Jerusalem was her humiliation. But humiliation leads to contempt. Now, it is hard to pity those who are despised. 2. *Consider the exceptions to this indifference.* (1) *Good Samaritans.* Thank God, such exist, though no synagogue honours them. One such is worth scores of priests and Levites who "pass by on the other side." (2) *The Divine compassion.* The sufferer looks down and looks around him and sees no pity. If he will look up, he will see that the very Being who smote in righteous wrath is waiting to heal in merciful forgiveness (Hosea vi. 1).

In conclusion, a parallel may be drawn between the sorrow of Christ and that of Jerusalem. The text cannot be understood to be written of our Lord. But it may illustrate that sorrow which far surpassed all other human grief. To how many is it as nothing! They pass the cross as Arabs and Phœnicians passed Jerusalem in her ruin. Yet, is it nothing to them? (1) Their sins caused Christ's sorrow. (2) Christ's sorrow can save their souls. (3) Christ's sorrow calls, not for pity, but for gratitude and faith.

Vers. 13, 14.—*Fourfold trouble from God.* I. THE TROUBLE IS FROM GOD. This is the characteristic of it that the writer dwells upon with most concern. 1. *We should recognise the Divine origin of trouble.* We miss the meaning and purpose of it if we do

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not see the hand that sends it. Earthly means may be used, as the King of Babylon was the agent for the destruction of Jerusalem. But all punishment for sin is inflicted by the Judge of sin. 2. *We should remember that trouble from God is most terrible trouble.* It springs from that most fierce anger, the anger of outraged love. It is directed by almighty power and cannot be evaded or resisted. It stops the alleviation of the best consolations by flowing from the same source from which those consolations would come. 3. *We should observe the purpose of trouble from God.* He doth not willingly afflict. If he sends distress it is for an object. What is that object? It may be to punish sin; then let us search out the sin and repent of it. It may be to wean us from earth; then let us cease from the idolatry of carnal things. It may be to teach us our weakness; then let us learn humility in our trouble. It may be to train us in patience and faith and spirituality; then let these graces have their perfect work.

II. THE TROUBLE IS FOURFOLD. It is various in form, touching one in one way and another most in a different way. But for each it is complex. 1. *It burns as fire.* At once it is felt to be fierce, poignant, and consuming. Thus does God seek to burn the chaff out of us. 2. *It catches our feet like a net.* God arrests the headlong career of folly with the net of trouble. It flings the heedless man to the ground, entangles his feet, and vexes his feelings. But it saves him from rushing on to his ruin. We may thank God for the distresses which stop our course when that runs in a wrong direction. 3. *It gives us pain and faintness like a sickness.* Thus are we humbled and subdued. The faintness of heart that sorrow brings is the best remedy for headstrong self-will and pride. 4. *It burdens like a yoke.* The transgressions bound and wreathed by the hand of God press upon the neck of the guilty. Several points in the image of a yoke may be observed. (1) It is a weight oppressing and wearying; (2) it is a constraint, hindering free action and imposing irksome conditions of motion; (3) it is connected with other impediments; (4) it presses very close upon our person; (5) it is carried about with us wherever we go, burdening us in all scenes and all circumstances; and (6) it is so "bound" and "wreathed" that it cannot be shaken off. Nevertheless, this trouble is sent for our good. It will be removed in due time if we repent and seek the grace of God in Christ. After it has gone, the relief from the distress of it will heighten the enjoyment of forgiveness.

Ver. 18.—*The righteousness of God confessed.* I. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD AS A FACT. 1. *What it is.* In its fulness and breadth it is the goodness of God, his sinlessness, his pure and holy character. But it has characteristics of more special importance. Righteousness in God is conformity with truth, justice, and honour. It means that God has no subtle double-dealing, but acts in perfect integrity. He moves in straight lines. Further, it means that God is fair to all, doing, if not the same thing to each, which would often be unjust, that which is fitting for every one. It also includes God's regard for the standard of right in his government, his care to make his creatures righteous, and his determination to check all unrighteousness. 2. *Why we are to believe in it.* It is declared most forcibly by those who know God best. Sceptical strangers may doubt it; but they who have entered into the presence of God, whether in holiness or in inspiration, alike agree in testifying to the righteousness of God. The deeper our Christian experience the more shall we be brought to admit this great truth.

II. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD HIDDEN UNDER A CLOUD. There are times when it is hard to say from our hearts, "The Lord is righteous." Doubts and difficulties should be boldly faced, for God cares for no lip-service of unbelieving flatterers. 1. *Trouble darkens our vision of the righteousness of God.* We fail to see the object of the storm while the darkness of it lowers over us. It seems to be greater than it is, and more than just, because we cannot take a fair view of it. 2. *Our own trouble seems to be out of proportion to that of other people.* We feel the full weight of our own burden; our neighbour's burden is seen at a distance, and then only seen, not felt. In her grief Jerusalem feels that she is visited with a strange pre-eminence of sorrow. Never was sorrow equal to hers (see ver. 12). This appears to be unjust. 3. *Our trouble looks more than we deserve.* So we think till we see our sin. To the impenitent God must often seem unjust. 4. *God has many purposes in sorrow that are unknown to us.* Therefore we fail to see the justice of the blow. But part of the discipline of trouble depends on our

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ignorance of its end. If we knew whither it was leading us we should not be led. Darkness is necessary for the training of faith.

III. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD CONFESSED. This is grand! In the midst of wailing and weeping Jerusalem confesses that the hand that dealt the blow was right. 1. *Faith is requisite for this confession.* The righteousness cannot be seen; it is still shrouded in darkness. But faith holds to it. Thus we must use in the darkness the knowledge which we have won in the light. 2. *Penitence is also necessary for this confession.* When we confess our guilt we are ready to confess God's righteousness, but not till then. Even Job had to abhor himself and repent in dust and ashes in order to see the righteousness of God (Job xlii. 6).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The contrasts of adversity.* The key-note of this strain of sorrow, this poetical and pathetic dirge, is struck in the opening words of the composition. The heart of the prophet laments over the captured and ruined city. How natural that the present should recall the past! Jerusalem, now in the hands of the Chaldeans, was once, in the days of David and of Solomon, the scene of glory and the seat of empire, the joy of the whole earth. So much the sadder is the contrast, the deeper the fall, the bitterer the cup of woe.

I. THE ONCE POPULOUS CITY IS SOLITARY. Not the walls, the streets, the palaces, the temples, but the inhabitants, are the true strength and glory of a city. Formerly Jerusalem was thronged with citizens who took pride in her majesty, of sojourners who came to gaze with wonder and admiration upon her splendours. Now her population has been reduced by famine, by exile, by war; and silence is in her streets.

II. THE CITY ONCE A PRINCESS IS TRIBUTARY. The time was when other cities acknowledged her sway, paid her their tribute, sent her of their produce and of the labour of their sons. Now she is reduced to subjection, yields her treasure to the foe, and the toil of her children is for the profit of the alien.

III. THE CITY THAT ONCE WAS JOYFUL WEEPS. Mirth and music have given place to mourning, lamentation, and woe. No longer are the sound of the viol and the harp, the voice of the bridegroom and the bride, heard in her dwellings. They resound with the cries of grief and anguish. She weepeth in the night, and her tears are on her cheek.

IV. THE CITY ONCE THE SPOUSE OF THE LORD IS WIDOWED. To Jerusalem it had been said, "Thy Maker is thy Husband!" But because of her unfaithfulness and apostasy the Lord has forsaken her; she is become as a widow, unprotected, deserted, solitary, and comfortless.

V. THE CITY ONCE RICH IN ALLIES AND HELPERS IS UNFRIENDED. Not only is she feeble within, she is friendless without. In prosperous days neighbouring nations sought her good will and alliance, and were forward with their offers of friendship and of help. All this is of the past; those who vowed faithfulness have proved treacherous, and have became the enemies of Judæa in the extremity of her desolation, forsaking, and woe.—T.

Ver. 4.—*The decline of national religion.* Nowhere has the great truth of the close dependence of national prosperity upon national religion been more plainly and emphatically taught than in the writings of the Hebrew prophets. Their spiritual insight detected the true cause of national degradation. Whoever looks below the surface may see that the decline and fall of nations may usually be traced to spiritual causes, to the loss of any hold upon eternal principles of righteousness and piety.

I. THE OPEN SYMPTOMS OF THE DECLINE OF A NATION'S RELIGION. Those here mentioned are in circumstances and colour local and temporary; they were determined, as a matter of course, by what was peculiar to the religion of the country and of the day. 1. *The roads of Zion are forsaken.* There is no concourse upon the roads leading up to the metropolis, as was the case in the days of Judah's prosperity. 2. *The gates are deserted and unentered.* There was a time when the busy population passed to and fro, when the people gathered together at the gates to discuss the news of the day, the affairs of the city, when the royal processions passed in splendour through the gates

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leading to the country. It is now so no longer. 3. *The festivals are unfrequented.* Formerly, when the great and sacred national feasts were being held, multitudes of Israelites attended these holy and welcome assemblies to share in the pious mirth, the cheering reminiscences, the fraternal fellowship, distinctive of such solemn and joyous occasions. But now there are none to celebrate the mercies of Jehovah, none to fulfil the sacred rites. To the religious heart the change is not only afflicting, it is crushing. 4. *The ministers of religion are left to mourn.* The priests who are left, if permitted to fulfil their office, do so under the most depressing influences; and no longer are there virgins to rejoice in the dance. The picture is painted in the darkest, saddest colours. We feel, as we enter into the prophet's lamentations, how dreary and hopeless is the state of that nation which God gives over to its foes.

II. THE CAUSE OF THE DECLINE OF A NATION'S RELIGION. This ever begins in spiritual unfaithfulness and defections. The external observances of religion may be kept up for a season, but this may be only from custom and tradition. The body does not at once decay when the spirit has forsaken it. To forget God, to deny his Word, to break his laws, to forsake his mercy-seat,—such are the steps by which a nation's decline is most surely commenced, by which a nation's ruin is most surely anticipated.

III. THE REMEDY FOR THE DECLINE OF A NATION'S RELIGION. 1. Confession. 2. Repentance. 3. Prayer for pardon and acceptance. 4. Resolution to obey the Lord, and again to reverence what is holy and to do what is right. 5. The union of all classes, rulers and subjects, priests and people, old and young, in a national reformation.—T.

Ver. 7.—*Mournful memories.* The recollection of the past may be the occasion of the highest joy or of the profoundest sorrow. To remember former happiness is one of the great pleasures of human life, if that happiness did but lead on to its own continuance and increase. The first beginnings of a delightful friendship, the first steps of a distinguished career, are remembered by the prosperous and happy with satisfaction and joy. It is otherwise with the memory of a morning of brightness which soon clouded, and which was followed by storms and darkness. In the text the anguish of Jerusalem is pictured as intensified by the recollection of bygone felicity.

I. THE PRESENT CALAMITY EXCITES BY CONTRAST THE RECOLLECTION OF PROSPEROUS TIMES. 1. *Affliction, homelessness, and misery* are the present lot of Jerusalem. The city is in the hands of the enemy. The people have no longer a home which they can cling to, but face the prospect of exile, destitution, and vagrancy. 2. *Helplessness.* In times of prosperity neighbours were eager to offer aid which was not needed; in these times of adversity no friendly proffer of help is heard. 3. *Mockery.* The Jews are a people from the first separated from surrounding nations by their laws, their customs, their religious observances. As an intensely religious people, they have ever set their hearts upon their revelation, upon the God of their fathers and his ordinances. Consequently they are most easily and most deeply wounded in their religious susceptibilities. Strange that a nation condemned to defeat and capture for its unfaithfulness to Jehovah should yet observe the appointed sabbaths, and keenly feel the ridicule and the contempt incurred by such observance! Her adversaries mocked her sabbaths.

II. THE RECOLLECTION OF PROSPEROUS TIMES ENHANCES THE ANGUISH OF PRESENT ADVERSITY. Time has been when Jerusalem, her monarch, citizens, and surrounding population have enjoyed peace, plenty, respect from other nations, liberty of worship, and joyful solemnities. The force of contrast makes the memory of such time bitter and distressing. Their "crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."

APPLICATION. Let present privileges and prosperity be so used that the memory of them may never occasion bitter regret and misery.—T.

Ver. 10.—*Spoliation and profanation.* The presence of a foreign foe in its capital has always been regarded, and is still regarded, as among the heaviest calamities that can befall a nation. In our own times, a neighbouring nation has been required to endure this humiliation and indignity, shocking its patriotism and its pride. We can understand how bitter must have been the anguish of the Jews when the Chaldean hosts patrolled their city, quartered themselves upon its inhabitants, appropriated its wealth, and violated the sanctity of its temple.

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I. THE POSSESSIONS OF THE JEWS WERE FORCIBLY APPROPRIATED BY THEIR ADVERSARIES. The greed of the conqueror has ever been the theme of satire and reproach. *Væ victis!* "Woe to the conquered!" is an old proverb, founded upon an older propensity of human nature in its military condition. The pleasant and desirable things of a city are the spoil of the conqueror. It was so when the Chaldeans entered Jerusalem, sacked the city, and laid their hands upon whatever pleased their fancy.

II. THE HOLY HOUSE OF JERUSALEM WAS SACRILEGIOUSLY ABUSED BY THE HEATHEN CONQUERORS. The temples of their gods are always the object of a nation's reverence and sometimes of affection. But the Jews had especial reason for venerating their sanctuary; it was the scene of their sacrifices and offerings, the depository of their oracles, the spot where the Shechinah-glory was displayed. The more sacred portion of the edifice was reserved for the priests; even the devout Jews were not suffered to enter these consecrated precincts. What, then, must have been the disgust, the horror, with which the pious contemporaries of Jeremiah, and especially the prophet himself, witnessed the profanation of the sanctuary, as the Chaldean soldiers polluted it with their heathen presence and speech! Their feelings were injured in the most susceptible part of their nature.

APPLICATION. Retribution is not an accident; neither is it the mere outworking of natural laws. There is Divine providence superintending it; it has a meaning, for it witnesses to human responsibility and sin; it has a purpose, for it summons to repentance and newness of life.—T.

Ver. 12.—*Unparalleled woe.* The prophecy here rises into poetry. The captured and afflicted city is personified. Like a woman bereaved and desolate and lonely, bewailing her misfortunes, and pouring out the anguish of her heart, Jerusalem sits in her solitary desolation and contempt, and calls upon bystanders to remark her sad condition, and to offer their sympathy to unequalled anguish.

I. THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF SORROW, DESOLATION, AND SHAME. How extreme is the distress and humiliation here depicted is apparent from the fact that this language has been attributed to our Divine Saviour when hanging upon the cross of Calvary. If a city never endured sorrow like that of Jerusalem, certainly no human being ever experienced agonies so piercing as those which the Captain of our salvation willingly bore for our sake when he gave his life a ransom for many.

"All ye that pass by,
To the Saviour draw nigh;
To you is it nothing that Jesus should die?
For sins not his own
He died to atone;
Was pain or was sorrow like his ever known?"

II. THE ADMISSION THAT AFFLICTION IS OF DIVINE APPOINTMENT, THAT IT IS CHASTISEMENT. When Jerusalem came to herself she could not fail to recognize a Divine hand in the miseries which befell her. The scourge was the army of the Chaldeans, but the hand was the righteous and retributive hand of the Eternal. It is too common for those who are in trouble to murmur against Providence, to exclaim against the injustice of providential appointments. Yet true wisdom points out that the path of submission and resignation is the right path. When once the mind is brought to acknowledge, "It is the Lord!" there is a prospect of spiritual improvement.

III. THE CRY FOR SYMPATHY. By a striking figure of speech, Jerusalem is represented as calling upon surrounding nations for interest and compassion. "Is it nothing to you? . . . Behold, and see!" Human sympathy is welcome in seasons of sorrow. Yet true help and deliverance must be from God, and from God alone. It is better to call upon the Lord than to call upon man; for he is both ready to sympathize and mighty to save.—T.

Ver. 18.—"*The Lord is righteous.*" In nothing is the distinction more marked between religions of human origin and device and the religion which is the revelation of infinite Wisdom and Truth, than in the views they respectively afford of the moral character and attributes of Deity. Whilst the heathen freely attribute to their gods qualities

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which are detestable in man, the Scriptures represent the Supreme as perfectly righteous. The acknowledgment here made by Jeremiah was made by Moses, by Nehemiah, by Daniel, and indeed is virtually, if not verbally, made by the writer of every book of the Old Testament. And the new covenant is based upon the revelation of a righteous Ruler and Father.

I. GOD IS RIGHTEOUS IN HIS CHARACTER. It is certainly no progress, but a retrogression towards ignorance and barbarism, to represent the supreme Intelligence as destitute of moral attributes, exercised in the fulfilment of wise and benevolent purposes. Affliction and anguish sometimes obscure men's judgment of the character and the dealings of God. It was not so with Jeremiah, who, in lamenting the troubles of his nation and of himself, did not distort the representation he gave to his countrymen of the attributes of the Most High.

II. GOD IS RIGHTEOUS IN HIS LAW. The theocratic government of the Hebrews was based upon the just character and the holy Law of the eternal King. To some minds the reflection might have seemed inappropriate and unwelcome in the depth of disaster. But a true prophet, a true religious teacher, feels bound to set forth the fact that the rule under which men live as individuals and as communities is a righteous rule; the justice of the Law abides although that Law be broken, and although its penalties be incurred and endured.

III. GOD IS RIGHTEOUS IN HIS RETRIBUTION. This is probably the thought most prominent in the text. The fate of Jerusalem was a hard fate, a lamentable fate, but it was not an unjust fate. The people reaped as they had sown. An onlooker might readily have acknowledged this, but it was a merit in a sufferer so to do. For the chastened to confess the justice of their chastisement is a proof that already the chastening is not in vain.—T.

Ver. 20.—*The cry of the contrite.* Trouble, when it leads to an inquiry into its cause, when it prompts to submission and to repentance, proves a means of grace. The cry of suffering and distress may have no moral significance; the cry of contrition and of supplication is a sign of spiritual impression, and is a step towards spiritual recovery.

I. THE OCCASION OF AFFLICTION AND CONTRITION. This is here specified, and the reality and severity are manifest. Within, *i.e.* in the homes and streets of the city, there is dearth; without, *i.e.* in the field, there is destruction by the sword. Thus in two strokes national calamity and disaster are depicted.

II. THE TOKENS OF AFFLICTION AND CONTRITION. Man's bodily nature is expressive of his spiritual state. Severe suffering and distress display themselves in organic, physical disturbance. The prophet feels in his bodily frame the disturbing effects of the trials he has undergone, the lively sympathy he has experienced.

III. THE CONFESSION TO WHICH AFFLICTION AND CONTRITION LEAD. Identifying the nation with himself, the prophet exclaims, "I have grievously rebelled." There is candour and justice, there is submissiveness, there is spiritual discernment, in this outspoken acknowledgment. No excuse, no extenuation, no complaint, is here, but a plain confession of ill desert. Rebels against a rightful authority, against a just, forbearing Sovereign, what could the Jews expect but such humiliation as they actually experienced? "If we *confess* our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive."

IV. THE CRY OF AFFLICTION AND OF CONTRITION. 1. It is a cry *unto the Lord.* Judah had looked for earthly friends and helpers, and had learned by bitter experience the vanity of such expectations. And now Judah sought the Lord whom by sin and rebellion she had offended. 2. It is an entreaty *for Divine regard* and consideration. What had happened was indeed by permission of Heaven. But the regard implored was one of sympathy, commiseration, and kindness. 3. It is a cry *for deliverance.* It is dictated by the assurance that he and only he who wounded can heal and comfort and restore.—T.

Ver. 1.—*Widowhood—the emblem of loneliness.* I. THE FORCE OF THE EMBLEM. Another emblem might have been used. Or the statement as to loneliness might have been left in its simplicity without any comparison at all. Why, then, this particular emblem? Because it sets forth the separation between two parties to a peculiar connection—a connection intended to have all the permanence which anything in this

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earth can have. Of the husband and wife it is to be said that "they twain have become one flesh," and when the wife becomes a widow she is left in a peculiar and irremediable loneliness, even though she be in the midst of kindred, neighbours, and friends. So also we may say that the inhabitants of Jerusalem, together with the place itself, its site, its houses, its streets, had become one great whole. The children of Israel wandered through the wilderness for forty years, but when at last they left it, it would not have been suitable to say that the wilderness had become as a widow.

II. A VIEW THUS SUGGESTED AS TO THE CAUSE OF SEPARATION. One kind of loneliness had come as a terrible visitation because another kind of loneliness had not been sought as an imperative condition of security. Had not Balaam said, "The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Numb. xxiii. 9)? Israel was to dwell in safety *alone*. What could be expected if the people mixed again so recklessly with those from whom they had been separated by a course of Divine marvels? It may also be noticed that Jerusalem would not have been left as a widow if the people of Jerusalem and the country altogether had had in them the spirit which prompted to deal wisely and compassionately with every widow. The widow had been carefully provided for by Mosaic enactments, *e.g.* in the solemn feasts and in the time of harvest. Yet in the first chapter of Isaiah's prophecies we find him denouncing the princes of the once faithful city because the cause of the widow did not come unto them.

III. A GROUND OF HOPE. Widowhood is evidently a state on which the loving God looks down with infinite tenderness and desire to help. Jerusalem became as a widow, yet the separation was not for ever. Her exiled inhabitants returned. Yet this was a small matter compared with the greater truths taught alike by the separation and the restoration. Things nearest and dearest to us may have to be taken away for a time, but all that belongs to our real welfare and to our complete relation to even the whole universe will come back in due time. We must not mistake eclipse for destruction.—Y.

Ver. 2.—*Nights of weeping explained.* Nights of weeping and constant tears upon the cheeks. Thus the metaphor is kept up with which this first song of lamentation begins. The sensitiveness of the woman-nature helps to bring out the prostration of Jerusalem. It is not only that her *condition* is lamentable, but she herself, in all the feelings of her heart, is a prey to the keenest anguish. People do not always see their own sad state as others see it. There is either a shallowness of nature or something has happened to deaden the sensibilities. But in this verse we have both the mention of tears and of most sufficient causes for tears.

I. FIRST CAUSE: WANT OF SYMPATHY AND SOLACE. Jerusalem has no *comforters*. Not even Job's comforters. For, though Job's comforters were sufficiently irritating and mistook blisters for salves, yet comfort was their errand. Bad as Job's state was, it would have been worse still if in his time of sore trouble he had been left quite alone, especially if professed friends had not come near him. But here the widowed Jerusalem has no comforter; and yet she had had many lovers, many who had been drawn irresistibly by the charm of her attractions. Jerusalem was proud of these attractions, and yet they did not belong to the essence of her existence. The attractions perished, and with the perishing of them the lovers whom they drew became cold. The attractions perished, but Jerusalem herself remained with all her needs, and yet with none to minister. Where do we mean to look for comforters when our hour of deepest trouble comes? Many to whom we may look will be able to do nothing for us; some to whom we may look will not try to do anything: happy then shall we be if we have reason to say, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, *thy* comforts delight my soul" (Ps. xciv. 19).

II. SECOND CAUSE: FRIENDS HAVE BECOME ENEMIES. When the attractions of Jerusalem faded away, not only did the lovers depart, but they had to seek new satisfactions elsewhere, and for many selfish reasons they would act in sympathy with the conquerors of Jerusalem. When she was a strong city, it suited surrounding peoples to be friendly; but when she became desolate and the whole land was lost, then it seemed the interest of these peoples to be hostile to Jerusalem. Indeed, their connection with Jerusalem was really hostile even when they meant friendship. Their open and strenuous hostility from the first would have been a better thing. Professed friends,

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without meaning it, may so mislead as to do more harm than the bitterest enemy could ever do. The real friend is he who, for the sake of truth and of the highest interests, is not afraid to be reckoned for the time an enemy.—Y.

Ver. 4.—*Zion forsaken as a religious centre.* I. THE PECULIAR GLORY OF ZION IN THE PAST. The ways of Zion mourned now, but the very fact that such a thing should be said showed that they had once been filled with rejoicing. The gates had been crowded with worshippers from every district of the land. Zion was glorified as the site of the temple, and the temple was glorified as holding within its imposing walls the ark of the covenant. Zion was the city of solemnities. Things were done there not according to will-worship or mere immemorial tradition, but according to Jehovah's definite instructions given in the wilderness through Moses centuries before. Praise continually waited for God in Zion. Jehovah loved the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. There was no day without its morning and evening sacrifice, and every sabbath and new moon brought their peculiar additions. Nor must we forget the Feast of the Passover, of the firstfruits, of the Pentecost, and the great feast of the seventh month. If as nothing more than times of mirth and relaxation, these would play a large part in the life of the people, and true prophets and whosoever among the priests had deep reverence for God would get much strength out of these services, finding in them, according to the measure of their faith, zeal, and diligence, constant means of grace.

II. THE PECULIAR HUMILIATION OF ZION IN THE PRESENT. The thought of Zion probably carried to the Israelite more associations than did the thought of any other place. The great periodic assemblies at Zion manifested the history, the privileges, the strength, the unity, of the nation. There may have been intervals of comparative neglect, but we know that in the time of Hezekiah there was a great keeping of the Passover. Thus, so far as outward observances were concerned, the machinery of Divine service must have been in good working order. But it is also very evident that the nation at large got no real good out of the numerous and elaborate rites which Jehovah had commanded. We may quote words of Hosea which, while they show the prominent position occupied by Zion in the national life, also explain the reason why God brought such desolation to Zion. "I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast-days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts" (Hos. ii. 11). Religion had been turned into mere merry-making. The house of prayer became a house of revelling. Jehovah had declared emphatically by his prophets that offerings had no value detached from righteousness and mercy. What wonder, then, that from condemning words he should advance to condemning deeds? Forsaken Zion itself spoke as if with a prophetic voice. It was when they remembered *Zion* that the exiles in Babylon wept, and when their masters wanted from them a song of Zion they could only reply that it was not possible to sing Jehovah's song in a strange land. There is warning in all this desolation of Zion as to how great discernment is needed to make sure that the elements of our worship are acceptable to God, edifying to ourselves, and not merely for self-pleasure.

III. We must not forget that BRIGHTER DAYS ARE PROPHESIED FOR ZION. The same old Zion was again crowded, but of this we must not make too much. Jesus himself had to say that the rebuilt house of his Father had become a house of merchandise and even a den of thieves. There is the ideal Zion, part of the heavenly Jerusalem, where the holiest service will be the highest joy, where our religion will no longer be imperilled by formality, superstition, or superficiality.—Y.

Ver. 11.—*The real need of the soul made manifest.* I. REAL NEED CAN ONLY BE MADE MANIFEST BY PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE. The greatest need of the natural life is bread, taking the word "bread" as representative of all food. Clothing and shelter, while they may indeed be reckoned as needs, are not needs after the same imperative fashion as food; and every one, however easily his daily bread comes to him, will assent to this same general truth that food is the great need of natural life. But he will only really feel this in such circumstances as are indicated in this verse. For a long while these people of Jerusalem had found bread lying to their hands when they were hungry. They could buy it and have abundance of pleasant things beside. The feeling of their

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hearts was that they could not do without these pleasant things, and when at last they gave them up to keep body and soul together, it must have been with terrible pain they made the surrender. And what is true of bread for the natural life is also true of the Bread coming down from heaven for the spiritual life. Christians, living in the midst of all manner of pleasant things of this world, with no lack of money to buy them and faculty to enjoy them, try to feel at the same time that more than all pleasant things are the grace, the life, the wisdom, the overflowing fulness of the Spirit, which come from Christ. But all the testimony of believers proves that the pleasant things need to be withdrawn before it can be apprehended that Christ is emphatically the Bread. It is when we lose relish of nature's best contributions to our happiness that Christ comes forward, confident as ever in his power to satisfy us.

II. THE VALUE OF TREASURES CAN ONLY BE KNOWN BY WHAT THE OWNER IS WILLING TO DO TO RETAIN THEM. All the pleasant things belonging to the *community* were already gone. The sanctuary had been desecrated and pillaged. Much private property had doubtless gone. But some the owners would be able to hide—jewels and such-like wealth as went into small compass. Among these pleasant things would be family heir-looms, loving gifts, possessions with respect to which the receiver had said to the giver, "I will keep this thing till I die." But now the great pressure comes, and one pleasant thing after another goes for a few handfuls of corn. The soul is threatening to depart from the body and it must be turned back; "for what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" And now notice that there are treasures of the heart, such treasures as come from faith in Christ and fidelity to him, which are not given up even to preserve natural life. Multitudes have gone willingly to death that thereby they might testify to the truth as it is in Jesus. They have laid firm hold of his own word, "Whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. xvi. 25).—Y.

Ver. 12.—*The observation of suffering.* I. A SEEMINGLY UNREASONABLE COMPLAINT. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" So speaks Jerusalem, personified under the guise of the weeping widow, with the tears on her cheeks and the beauty faded, deprived of all her pleasant things, and left in solitude so far as her familiar supports and consolations are concerned. She sits, as it were, by the highway, and the crowd passes on, taking no notice. Why, indeed, should it take notice? The spectacle of a conquered nation and a pillaged capital was not a rare thing. The nations asked to sympathize had been through the same experience themselves. We are all prompted to say, "Surely no trouble has been like our trouble;" and yet, as our observation of human affairs enlarges, we see how human nature, in every individual instance, is made to know its extraordinary capacity for suffering. Nevertheless, the piteous appeal here is not a baseless one. The trouble of the children of Israel had not come upon them after the manner of a common nation. They were peculiar in constitution, privileges, and history. If only there had been eyes to see it, there was something very significant to demand attention. But the thing to be seen did not lie on the surface, nor was it to be discovered save by faculties specially illuminated. The downfall and the sufferings of Israel, as they are to be seen both in the Scriptures and subsequent history, belong to the things that are to be spiritually discerned. Therefore this complaint, while superficially it may be called unreasonable, is yet reasonable enough, if we only consider the position and mission of Israel, and the work which, even in her degradation, she has done for the world.

II. THE NEED THERE IS TO MARK JEHOVAH'S SURE VISITATIONS ON THE DISOBEDIENT. This is the critical element in the appeal that widow-like Jerusalem makes to the passers-by: "Look at me as the greatest illustration of the certainty with which Jehovah punishes those who rebel against him." We must, of course, beware of the conclusion that suffering always means punishment; but where we can see that it is punishment we must mark it as such, so that we ourselves may be admonished and may also more effectually admonish others. Here was a nation that in obedience might have rested confidently and happily in Jehovah's promise. The power behind that promise was more than all the armies of the great empires round about. But when the power was withdrawn it meant not merely suffering; the withdrawing had in it the nature of a judicial, solemn sentence from Jehovah himself.—Y.

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Ver. 18.—*The acknowledgment that suffering is deserved.* I. THE CLEAR RECOGNITION ON THE PART OF THOSE VISITED THAT THE SUFFERING WAS OF JEHOVAH'S BRINGING. Secondary causes were prominent, but behind them was a Divine cause most important to be perceived in all the intensity of its working. Those who desolated Jerusalem did so from the worst of motives, motives always to be condemned; and these motives, keenly inspiring as they were, would have ended in nothing save for the weakness in which Israel had been left by its apostasy from God. When we are suffering for our sin and folly it is good if we can recognize that the suffering is of God's producing. Because that which God produces God can remove in the hour of repentance. Whereas what man produces he may not be able to put right again, even when he is so disposed.

II. A REASON IS GIVEN FOR DECLARING JEHOVAH RIGHTEOUS. He has done righteously to those who have rebelled against his commandments. God has made us so that we can distinguish between the right and the wrong. We need ever to be on our guard against saying that a thing is right because God does it. What is admitted here is that it is a right thing for God to inflict chastisement on the disobedient. The greater the disobedience the severer must be the chastisement. The commandment of God was always a right thing in itself; and the prophets had again and again illustrated the righteousness of particular commandments and the evident miseries that flowed from neglecting them. Recollect that this great blow upon Israel came after many lesser ones. It was not as if Israel could plead that the commandments were dubious or the warnings scanty.

III. It must not be forgotten that JEHOVAH'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IS EQUALLY SHOWN IN HIS TREATMENT OF THE OBEDIENT. It is of the greatest importance to recollect this, because unfortunately the disobedient are more noticeable than the obedient, and the treatment of the disobedient, by consequence, more noticeable than the treatment of the obedient. The spirit of our life determines, by a most fixed law, the way in which God will treat us. It is perfectly impossible for the disobedient to escape suffering. But it is equally impossible for the obedient to lose their reward. Joy and blessedness, the exquisite peace and rapture of holiness, must come to them by the very nature of things.—Y.

Ver. 21.—*A wicked gladness.* I. THE WRONG FEELING WITH REGARD TO SUFFERING FOR SIN. People are here represented as rejoicing over the sufferings of others. Not that they take delight in suffering as suffering, but those who suffered were their enemies. Those now suffering had once inflicted suffering on others. They had been a source of danger, provoking jealousy, and producing humiliation. Hence, when Israel fell into all this solitude and misery, other peoples not only failed to pity, but even positively rejoiced. This was just what might be expected, and even if some of the heathen nations said, "This serves Israel right for neglecting Jehovah," it was certainly nothing more than the simple truth. The wrong thing was the exultant feeling, the gladness of heart over all this suffering. There is no fear but what we shall sympathize with the suffering of the innocent, the pain coming from some accident or disease; but when it is an *evil-doer* who suffers, then we are only too easily betrayed into language expressing gladness of heart. And we should never be *glad* with respect to any suffering whatever. Let it be remembered, too, that gladness is only one out of several possible wrong attitudes with respect to suffering. If while others are suffering for their sins we allow ourselves to get into any of these wrong attitudes with respect to them, then our unchristian state of mind may prove a very serious obstacle in the way of their repentance and amendment. The censuring, lecturing spirit must be guarded against, and also the spirit that looks down as from a position of superior goodness. We must restore others in a spirit of meekness, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted.

II. THE RIGHT FEELING WITH REGARD TO SUFFERING FOR SIN. The absence of the wrong feeling can only be secured by the presence of the right one. If selfish gladness, the gladness springing from envy and jealousy, is to be kept out, it must be by constantly cultivating pity for all suffering. Pity is to be the very first feeling with which all suffering is contemplated. Pity must, indeed, be well under control, and never allowed to open the way for a greater suffering by taking away a lesser one, but it must always be the prevailing feeling. Then also we must take care to rejoice with the rejoicing. It increases the happiness of others to know that we are glad because of their happiness

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Our work as Christians is only part done in removing the evil; our thoughts are to be chiefly fixed on producing and establishing the good with all its fruits so pleasant to the spiritual eye, so pleasant to the taste of the inner man. The enemies of Israel saw Israel fallen, and rejoiced that Jehovah had done this. When we see the fallen lifted up and walking along in the strength of Christ, let us rejoice exceedingly because of what the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has done. It is worth all our efforts to keep out of our hearts mean satisfaction because of the disappointments and confusion of others.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER II.

ZION'S JUDGMENT IS OF GOD. LAMENTATIONS AND SUPPLICATIONS.

Ver. 1.—**Hath the Lord covered**; rather, *doth . . . cover*. **The daughter of Zion**; *i.e.* Jerusalem. **Cast down from heaven**. Here and in Matt. xi. 23 we have a parallel to Isa. xiv. 12, where the King of Babylon is compared to a bright star. "Cast down" whither? Into the "pit" or dungeon of Hades (Isa. xiv. 15). **The beauty of Israel**; *i.e.* Jerusalem, exactly as Babylon is called "the proud beauty [or, 'ornament'] of Chaldea" (Isa. xiii. 19). **His footstool**; *i.e.* the ark (Ps. cxxxii. 7), or perhaps the temple as containing the ark (1 Chron. xxviii. 2; Ps. xcix. 5).

Ver. 2.—**Habitations**; rather, *pastures*. The word properly means the settlements of shepherds in green, grassy spots, but here designates the country parts in general, distinguished from the "strongholds" of Judah. **Hath polluted**. So Ps. lxxxix. 39, "Thou hast profaned [same word as here] his crown [by casting it] to the ground." The wearer of a crown was regarded in the East as nearer to divinity than ordinary mortals; in some countries, indeed, *e.g.* in Egypt, almost as an incarnation of the deity. To discrown him was to "pollute" or "profane" him.

Ver. 3.—**All the horn**; rather, *every horn*; i.e. all the means of defence, especially the fortresses. **He hath drawn back his right hand**; *i.e.* he hath withdrawn his assistance in war. **He burned against**; rather, *he burned up*.

Ver. 4.—The beginning of the verse seems slightly out of order (see the Septuagint). **And slew all that were pleasant**, etc. The correct rendering is, *And slew all that was pleasant to the eye: in the tent of the daughter of Zion he poured out his fury like fire*. The Authorized Version (following the Targum) seems to have thought that the youth of the population alone was intended. But, though Ewald also adopts this view, it seems to limit unduly the meaning of the poet. By "tent" we should probably understand "dwelling," as Jer. iv. 5, and often; Isa. xvi. 5, "the tent of David;" Ps. lxxviii. 67, "the tent of Joseph."

Ver. 5.—**Was as an enemy: he hath swallowed, etc.** The threefold division of the verse is, unfortunately, concealed in the Authorized Version, owing to the arbitrary stopping. The grouping suggested by the Massoretic text is—

"The Lord is become an enemy, he hath swallowed up Israel;
He hath swallowed up all her palaces, he hath destroyed all his strongholds;
And hath increased in the daughter of Judah moaning and bemoaning."

The change of gender in the second line is easily explicable. In the first case the poet is thinking of the city; in the second, of the people of Israel. The rendering "moaning and bemoaning" is designed to reproduce, to some extent, the Hebrew phrase, in which two words, derived from the same root, and almost exactly the same, are placed side by side, to give a more intense expression to the idea.

Ver. 6.—**Violently taken away**; rather, *violently treated*; i.e. broken up. **His tabernacle**; rather, *his booth*. "Tent" and "dwelling" are interchangeable expressions (see ver. 4); and in the Psalms "booth" is used as a special poetic synonym for "tent" when God's earthly dwelling-place, the sanctuary of the temple, is spoken of (so Ps. xxvii. 5; xxxi. 20; lxxvi. 2). The Authorized Version, indeed, presumes an allusion to the proper meaning of the Hebrew word, as if the poet compared the sanctuary of Jehovah to a pleasure-booth in a garden. It is, however, more natural to continue, *as a garden*, the sense of which will be clear from Ps. lxxx. 12, 13. The Septuagint has, instead, "as a vine"—a reading which differs from the Massoretic by having one letter more (*kaggéfen* instead of *kaggan*). This ancient reading is adopted by Ewald, and harmonizes well with Isa. v. 1, etc.; Jer. ii. 21 (comp. Ps. lxxx. 8); but the received text gives a very good sense. "Garden" in the Bible means, of course, a plantation of trees rather than a flower-garden. **His places of the assembly**; rather, *his place of meeting (with God)*. The

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word occurs in the same sense in Ps. lxxiv. 3. It is the temple which is meant, and the term is borrowed from the famous phrase, *ōhel mō'ēdh* (Exod. xxvii. 21; comp. xxv. 22).

Ver. 7.—**Her palaces**; *i.e.* those of the daughter of Zion, especially "high buildings" (this is the true meaning of *'armōn*) of the temple. **They have made a noise**, etc. Comp. Ps. lxxiv. 3, "Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy place of meeting." The passages are parallel, though, whether the calamities referred to are the same in both, cannot *à priori* be determined. The shouts of triumph of the foe are likened to the festal shouts of the temple-worshippers (comp. Isa. xxx. 29; Amos v. 24).

Ver. 8.—**He hath stretched out a line.** It is the "line of desolation" mentioned in Isaiah (xxxiv. 11; comp. Amos vii. 7; 2 Kings xxi. 13). Such is the unsparing rigour of Jehovah's judgments.

Ver. 9.—**Are sunk into the ground**; *i.e.* are broken down and buried in the dust. **The Law** is no more. The observance of the Law being rendered impossible by the destruction of the temple. Comp. this and the next clause with Ezek. vii. 26.

Ver. 10.—**They have cast up dust**, etc. A sign of mourning (Josh. vii. 6; 2 Sam. xiii. 19; Job ii. 12).

Ver. 11.—**My bowels are troubled** (see on ch. i. 20). **My liver is poured upon the earth.** A violent emotion being supposed to occasion a copious discharge of bile. **The daughter of my people.** A poetic expression for Zion or Judah.

Ver. 12.—**Corn.** Either in the sense of parched corn (comp. Lev. xxiii. 14; 1 Sam. xvii. 17; Prov. xxvii. 22) or a poetic expression for "bread" (comp. Exod. xvi. 4; Ps. cv. 40).

Ver. 13.—**What thing shall I take to witness for thee?** rather, *What shall I testify unto thee?* The nature of the testifying may be gathered from the following words. It would be a comfort to Zion to know that her misfortune was not unparalleled: *solamen miseris socios habuisse malorum.* The expression is odd, however, and, comparing Isa. xl. 18, A. Krochmal has suggested, *What shall I compare?* The correction is easy. **Equal**; *i.e.* compare (comp. Isa. xlvi. 5).

Ver. 14.—**Thy prophets.** Jeremiah constantly inveighs against the fallacious, immoral preaching of the great mass of his prophetic contemporaries (comp. Jer. vi. 13, 14; xiv. 13—15; xxiii. 14—40). **Have seen vain and foolish things**; *i.e.* have announced "visions" (prophecies) of an unreal and irrational tenor. Comp. Jer. xxiii. 13, where the same word here paraphrased as "irrational" (literally, *insipid*) occurs. **Discovered**; *i.e.* disclosed. **To turn away thy captivity.** The Captivity, then, might have been "turned away," if the other prophets had, like Jeremiah, disclosed the true spiritual state of the people, and moved them to repentance. **False burdens.** Suggestive references to these false prophecies occur in Jer. xiv. 13, 14; xxiii. 31, 32 (see the Exposition on these passages). **Causes of banishment.** So Jeremiah (xxvii. 10; comp. 15), "They prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land."

Ver. 15.—**Clap . . . hiss . . . wag their heads.** Gestures of malicious joy (Job xxvii. 23) or contempt (Jer. xix. 8; Ps. xxii. 7). **The perfection of beauty**; literally, the *perfect in beauty.* The same phrase is used in Ezekiel (xxvii. 3; xxviii. 12) of Tyre, and a similar one in Ps. l. 2 of Zion.

Vers. 16, 17.—On the transposition of the initial letters in these verses, see Introduction.

Ver. 16.—**Have opened their mouth against thee.** As against the innocent sufferer of Ps. xxii. (ver. 13). **Gnash the teeth.** In token of rage, as Ps. xxxv. 16; xxxvii. 12. **We have seen it** (comp. Ps. xxxv. 21).

Ver. 17.—**His word that he had commanded**, etc. "Commanded," *i.e.* given in charge to. Comp. Zech. i. 6, "My words and my statutes, which I *commanded* my servants the prophets." Zechariah continues, in language which illustrates the foregoing words of this verse, "Did they not take hold of [overtake] your fathers;" where the persons spoken of as "your fathers" are the same as those who are represented by the speaker of the elegy. "In the days of old;" alluding, perhaps, to such passages as Deut. xxviii. 52, etc. **The horn of thine adversaries.** "Horn" has a twofold meaning—"strength" or "defence" (comp. ver. 3), and "honour" or "dignity" (comp. 1 Sam. ii. 1). The figure is too natural to need explanation.

Ver. 18.—**Their heart cried unto the Lord**, etc. "Their heart" can only mean "the heart of the people of Jerusalem." For the expression, comp. Ps. lxxxiv. 2, "My heart and my flesh cry aloud to the living God." To avoid the rather startling prosopopœia in the next clause, Thenius supposes a corruption in the group of letters rendered "wall," and attaches the corrected word to the first clause, rendering thus: "Their heart crieth unto the Lord in vain; O daughter of Zion, let tears run down," etc. Another resource, which also involves an emendation, is that of Ewald, "Cry with all thy heart, O wall of the daughter of Zion." **O wall**, etc. The prosopopœia is surprising, but is only a degree more striking than that of ver. 8 and ch. i. 4. In Isa. xiv. 31 we find an equally strong one, "Howl, O gate." Most probably, however,

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there is something wrong in the text; the following verses seem to refer to the daughter of Zion. Bickell reads thus: "Cry aloud unto the Lord, O virgin daughter of Zion." **Like a river**; rather, *like a torrent*. **Give thyself no rest.** The word rendered "rest" means properly the stiffness produced by cold.

Ver. 19.—**In the beginning of the watches.** This would seem to be most naturally explained as referring to the first watch of the night. When most are wrapped in their first and sweetest sleep, the daughter of Zion is to "arise and cry." Others explain, "at the beginning of each of the night watches;" *i.e.* all the night through. Previously to the Roman times, the Jews had divided the night into three watches (comp. Judg. iii. 19). **Pour out thine heart like water**; *i.e.* give free course to thy complaint, shedding tears meanwhile. The expression is parallel partly to phrases like "I am poured out like water" (Ps. xxii. 14), partly to "Pour out your heart before him" (Ps. lxii. 8). **In the top of every street**; rather, *at every street corner* (and so ch. iv. 1).

Ver. 20.—**To whom thou hast done this**; viz. to Israel, the chosen people. **And children**; rather, (*even*) *children*. The children are the "fruit" referred to. Comp. the warnings in Lev. xxvi. 26; Deut. xxviii. 56; and especially Jer. xix. 9; also the historical incident in 2 Kings vi. 28, 29. **Of a span long**; rather, *borne in the hands*. The word is derived from the verb rendered "to swaddle" in ver. 22 (see note).

Ver. 22.—**Thou hast called as in a solemn day.** The passage is illustrated by ch. i. 15, according to which the instruments of Jehovah's vengeance are "summoned" by him to a festival when starting for the holy war. **My terrors round about.** Almost identical with one of the characteristic phrases of Jeremiah's prophecies, "fear [or rather, 'terror'] on every side" (see on Jer. vi. 25). **Have swaddled**; rather, *have borne upon the hands*.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*God not remembering his footstool.* The ark was regarded as God's footstool; and the temple in which the ark was kept was also sometimes called the footstool of God. When the temple was destroyed and the ark stolen, or broken, or lost, it looked as though God had forgotten his footstool. The symbolism of the ark and the ritual connected with it give a peculiar significance to this fact.

I. GOD NO LONGER REMEMBERS THE PLACE WHERE HIS PRESENCE WAS MOST FULLY MANIFESTED. The Holy Land, Jerusalem, the temple, the holy of holies, the ark,—these are the sacred places, of increasing sanctity as the circle narrows, till the very footstool where God touches earth is reached. 1. The presence of God in our midst is *no guarantee against the natural consequences of our misdeeds.* On the contrary, if he is with us to protect in times of simple distress, he is with us as Judge to condemn when we fall and contract guilt. 2. The presence of God at one time is *no guarantee of its permanence.* The footstool may be God's no longer if it prove unworthy of him. The Church which was once the temple of the Holy Spirit may become deserted by its heavenly Guest. That we enjoy the communion of God now is no reason for being confident that we shall not lose that privilege through unbelief or other sin. 3. *We cannot assume that God will never reject us because he has once made use of us.* The footstool may be supposed to have been used by God as of some service to him. Nevertheless it was discarded. If the servant of God proved unfaithful, his Master's livery will not save him. He will be discharged and disgraced.

II. GOD NO LONGER REMEMBERS HIS MERCY-SEAT. The footstool of God's peculiarly manifested presence was also his mercy-seat. There the assurance of atonement was confirmed when the high priest entered with sacrificial blood and intercession. Yet even the mercy-seat can be forgotten in the day of God's anger. We trust that in wrath he will remember mercy. But there are clouds of anger too black for us to see the mercy that shines behind them. 1. *The mercy which is in the heart of God is not to be regarded as nullifying his wrath.* It is so represented by some who take one-sided views of the Divine character. But the All-merciful can be a consuming fire. 2. *If God has once been merciful to us we may not conclude that he can never be angry with us.* On the contrary, if we sin against light and love we provoke the greater wrath. The very fact that the footstool was privileged to be a mercy-seat will aggravate the wrath which must be poured upon it when it is disgraced.

III. GOD NO LONGER REMEMBERS THE PLACE OF PRAYER. At the footstool of God

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the suppliant kneels pleading for deliverance. But his prayer is unheard. God may refuse to hearken to prayer. Where he is wont to stoop and listen to cry and sigh of burdened souls he may be regardless. 1. *Impenitence* will lead to God's disregarding our prayer. 2. When wrath is necessary, the *mere cry for escape must be unheard.* 3. When chastisement is for our good, *mercy itself will refuse to listen to the prayer for deliverance.* The surgeon must disregard the cries of his patient. He must harden himself to save the sufferer.

Vers. 4, 5.—*The Lord as an enemy.* I. THE LORD MAY BECOME TO US AS AN ENEMY. We must not suppose the relations of God to those who forsake him to be purely negative. He cannot simply leave them to their own devices. He is a King who must needs maintain order and restrain and punish rebellion, a Judge who cannot permit law to be trampled underfoot with impunity, a Father who cannot abandon his children, but must chastise them in their wrong-doing just because he is so closely related to them. Let it be well understood, then, that, in opposing ourselves to God, we run counter to a power, a will, an active authority. We provoke the anger of God. We do not simply strike ourselves against the stone, we cause the stone to fall upon us and grind us to powder.

II. NOTHING CAN BE MORE TERRIBLE THAN FOR THE LORD TO BECOME TO US AS AN ENEMY. The very thought of God as an enemy should strike terror into one who finds it is a fact. 1. *God is almighty.* It is at once apparent that the war must end in defeat for the rebel. 2. *God is just.* Then he must be in the right with the great controversy. We must be fighting on the wrong side when we are fighting against God. 3. *God is gracious.* How fearful must be the wrong-doing that provokes so kind a God to enmity! 4. *God is our Father.* Our Father become as our enemy! The unnatural situation proclaims its own horror. The nearness of God and his love to us make the fire of his wrath the more fierce. The wrath of the "Lamb" is more awful than the raging of him who goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

III. GOD DOES NOT BECOME TO US AS AN ENEMY UNTIL WE HAVE PROVED OURSELVES TO BE ENEMIES TO HIM. He has no wish to quarrel with us. He is changeless in his constancy of righteousness and love. It is we who break the peace. The declaration of war between heaven and earth is always issued by the lower world. It is not necessary, however, that our enmity should be overt in order that God may be seen as an enemy. Secret alienation of heart, quiet neglect of God's will, self-willed indifference to God, will constitute enmity. The fact that the enmity begins on our side will take away all excuse suggested by our feebleness in comparison with the greatness of God.

IV. THOUGH GOD MAY BECOME TO US AS AN ENEMY, HE WILL NOT REALLY BE AN ENEMY. He may act like an enemy, but he will not act in enmity. He will never hate the creature that he has made. His apparent enmity is very fearful because it results in actions of anger and punishment. Still behind all is the pitying heart of Divine love. God pities most when he strikes hardest.

V. THROUGH THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST GOD CEASES TO BE TO US AS AN ENEMY. Christ is our Propitiation. By the sacrifice of himself he makes peace. And he does not simply influence our hearts in reconciling us to God. There is a Godward aspect of the atonement. This is not to induce God to love us, since the love of God precedes and originates the very mission of Christ. But in the mysterious counsels of Divine wisdom the atonement of Christ is rendered necessary for the cessation of God's inimical action (1 John ii. 1, 2).

Vers. 6, 7.—*The rejected altar.* In the first elegy we read how the feasts are neglected by the people (ch. i. 4). Now we see that God himself has broken them up and cast off his altar. Thus we advance a stage in understanding the deplorable condition of Jerusalem. At first the human side only is seen and the visible facts are lamented over. Then the Divine side is discerned and the terrible cause of the cessation of the solemn festivals revealed. It is not simply that the people cease to present themselves before the altar. God has abandoned and rejected all the temple services.

I. HOW GOD REJECTS THE ALTAR. We must bear in mind that the altar belongs to

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God and that all the ordinances of worship are his. Religion is not merely human and subjective. It relates to God and it goes out of the human world reaching up to the Divine. There is scope, therefore, for God's action in it. He may refuse his action. He may not hear the prayers, nor accept the offerings, nor employ the services, nor succour the needs of the worshipper. Then he rejects the altar. This is represented as being done with violence, destruction, and a Divine abhorrence. The desolation wrought by Babylon is traced up to the hand of God. So when our religious privileges are broken up by earthly means we should inquire whether God's displeasure is behind the calamity. It is not necessarily. But it may be.

II. WHY GOD REJECTS THE ALTAR. 1. Because *the worship is insincere.* If we practise the forms of devotion without the heart of it our hypocrisy will only insult God. 2. Because *the worshipper is corrupt.* Thus was it with the Jews in Isaiah's time. God says, "Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth . . . when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood" (Isa. i. 14, 15). So David says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. lxvi. 18). 3. Because *the offering is unworthy.* The Israelite was to bring his best to God. No blemished sacrifice would be accepted. If we give less than the best in our power we make an unworthy offering. If only spare time and superfluous money are offered to God, how can we expect him to receive such mean and niggardly service? He will have our brightest hours, our richest devotion, our hearts and lives and all, or he will take nothing.

III. WITH WHAT RESULTS GOD REJECTS THE ALTAR. When once the altar is rejected by God all sacrifice and service are vain. It matters little that the enemy throw down the stones of it. If it remains intact it is worthless. We may have full assemblies of people and rich and elaborate services and all the pomp and ceremony of worship; and it will be for nothing if God reject the worship. We think too little of this Divine side of religion. We are too much inclined to rest in the decorum and grace of becoming human forms of worship. Let it be known that the one end of worship is to reach God. If he is met by the soul, it matters little what means be used in worship. If he refuses to accept us, the form of worship is a mockery and a delusion.

Ver. 9 (last clause).—"*No vision.*" I. THE TEACHING AND VISION OF PROPHETIC TRUTH CONSTITUTE AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN RELIGIOUS LIFE. The writer laments the loss of teaching and vision as abnormal and disastrous. The vision of the prophets was not simply nor chiefly concerned with the distant future and recondite counsels of providence. It dealt with present facts and unveiled their true character. It guided in the present and with regard to the uncertainties of the very near future. The humbler office of teaching was associated with it. The prophet, a seer of visions in private and on special occasions, was a teacher among his fellow-men and under ordinary circumstances. It is important to see how essential the knowledge of truth is to a healthy spiritual life. Without it devotion becomes superstition. Religion is based on revelation. The school precedes the workshop. Teaching must prepare the way for service.

II. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN TEACHING AND VISION CEASE. The two may not fail exactly at the same time. But the stream will not flow long after the fountain is dried. The teaching that is continued after all inspiration has died out will be arid, formal, lifeless, unreal. Ideas will take place of facts, and words of ideas. Now, the vision, which is the starting-point of all knowledge of truth, is intermittent. There have been ages fertile in prophecy and there have been barren ages. In the days preceding the ministry of Samuel "the Word of the Lord was rare, and there was no vision scattered abroad" (1 Sam. iii. 1). After the roll of the Old Testament was complete, prophecy ceased. It revived in the apostolic age. Spiritual insight and Divine knowledge have been intermittent since then, sleeping in the dark ages, flashing out in the days of St. Bernard, dried up by the dreariness of scholasticism, swelling out in fresh energy with the Reformation, withering again at the end of the seventeenth century, and brightening once more from the close of the eighteenth. What shall be the next turn?

III. THE ABUSE OF PROPHETIC VISION AND TEACHING LEADS TO THE CESSATION OF THEM. The prophets prophesied falsely (ver. 14). They preached peace when there was no peace (Jer. xxiii. 17). As a penalty for their treason to their sacred trust of truth they lost the gift of spiritual vision. Disloyalty to truth warps our perceptions

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of truth. False living hinders true thinking. There is nothing which so deadens and blinds the spiritual faculties as indifference to truth. Beginning with telling a conscious lie, a man comes at last to accept falsehood without knowing it.

IV. THE REJECTION OF PROPHETIC VISION AND TEACHING ALSO LEADS TO THE CESSATION OF THEM. The people were as guilty as their teachers. They refused to hear truth and asked for pleasant words. They declined to obey the truth which they had heard. The penalty of disobedience to Divine truth will be the loss of that truth. If we refuse to go as the vision of God in our souls directs, that vision will fade out, leaving us no light of heaven, but only gloom or false lights of earth.

Ver. 14.—*The vision of falsehood and folly.* Visions from the Lord have ceased (ver. 9). But the prophets continue to see visions of earthly limitation or even of diabolical delusion. These visions are false and foolish. Better have none than such.

I. PROPHECY IN ITS CORRUPTION SEES THE FALSE AND FOOLISH IN PLACE OF THE TRUE AND WORTHY. 1. *The mission of prophecy is to see and declare wisdom and reality.* The attractiveness of the teaching is a snare if the matter of it is vain. People naturally favour the pleasant utterance of pleasant things. Doctrines are sometimes chosen because they are liked rather than because they are known to be sound, or the style and language of the preacher are more heeded than the substance of his message. But, if we were in earnest, ugly truths would always be accepted in preference to specious falsehoods. 2. *The corruption of prophecy substitutes falsehood and folly for truth and wisdom.* This may be experienced unconsciously. The teacher may not know that he has fallen. It is not only that his tongue utters lies, his eye sees no truth. His vision is distorted and he knows it not. He is not aware that he sees men as trees walking. Nor does he know that his folly is not wisdom. The failing of spiritual vision and decay of wisdom are the more calamitous because they are unconscious. They are a sort of spiritual insanity. 3. *The evil of the corruption of prophecy is in the widespread delusion and degradation that it produces.* "Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee." The prophet is a teacher as well as a seer. When the teacher errs the scholars are misled.

II. THE FAILURE TO DISCOVER INIQUITY IS A PROOF THAT A PROPHET'S VISION IS FALSE AND FOOLISH. 1. *A prophet is required to see human as well as Divine truth.* It needs inspiration to read the secrets of the heart as much as to discover the mysteries of the unseen heavens or of the distant future. A prophet should be a discerner of spirits. If he cannot read the signs of the times he is a failure. 2. *The failure to see iniquity is one especial evidence of perverted prophetic vision.* The physician is first of all called upon to discover his patient's disease. If he cannot detect this the rest of his work is of little use. Prophets may dream of the millennium and discourse of the celestial spheres; but so long as they are blind to the sins that men around them are perishing in, their primary mission must fail. Now, it needs a Divine inspiration rightly to see iniquity. Conventionality of thought leads to a complacent satisfaction with the normal state of the world. We must be out of it and above it to observe how it has fallen. The preacher who cannot see the sins of his age is worse than useless. He is a deluding flatterer. The individual man who is blind to his own sin has not the first ray of spiritual light which may guide him aright.

III. THE FALSE AND FOOLISH VISION OF PROPHECY DOES NOT RESTORE PROSPERITY, BUT ON THE CONTRARY IT DIRECTLY LEADS TO RUIN. By vainly promising pleasant things it brings disastrous ones. The false prophets opposed Jeremiah and said the Captivity would not come. By that very falsehood they helped to hasten it. Had they preached repentance and warned of wrath, the doom might have been averted. None prepare souls for ruin more certainly than smooth-speaking flattering optimists. When danger is near, the warning prophet may be the deliverer of his hearers. If the preacher fail to produce conviction of sin he cannot lead to salvation in Christ. So long as men do not see their lost condition they are in danger of their soul's ruin. To them a pleasant religion is a fatal religion. A Jeremiah, a John the Baptist, and a John Knox are the best friends of their generation.

Ver. 16.—*The triumph of the foe.* I. THE TRIUMPH OF THE FOE OVER JERUSALEM. Strangers mock with scorn and derision, enemies vent their rage with hissing, gnashing

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of teeth, and a spiteful satisfaction that the day they have looked for has come. Why should these cruel feelings be roused against the prostrate city? Her previous condition must have provoked them. 1. *Great prosperity.* This excites envy in the less prosperous, and envy soon sours into hatred. Jealous and selfish natures have a positive pleasure in seeing the loss of special privileges in the more favoured, although that loss may bring no advantage to themselves. 2. *High pretensions.* Jerusalem claimed to be especially favoured and blessed by God. She looked down with scorn on her neighbours. Such an attitude was galling to them and led to an outburst of delight when the proud city lay grovelling in the dust. Contempt provokes enmity. No calamity receives less pity than the downfall of pride. 3. *Reserved isolation.* Jerusalem kept herself apart from other cities. She felt that she had a peculiar vocation. Such exclusiveness would excite dislike. The unsocial are unpitied. It may be that the separation is inevitable or conscientious. Still, it incurs not the least aversion.

II. THE TRIUMPH OF THE FOE OVER THE CHURCH. The fall of Jerusalem was the fall of the Church. The enemies of the Eternal rejoiced in the destruction of his temple and the scattering of his people. There are always adversaries on the look out for disaster in the Church of Christ. The evil spirit of the world is vexed and shamed by the standing rebuke of a pure Church. Corrupt men see in her an example contrasting with their own conduct and thereby condemning it. Thus there arise dislike and enmity. The shame of the Church is a relief to this worldly opposition. There have been times when the Name of God has been insulted through this evil pleasure of the wicked in the shame that the sin and failure of his people have brought upon his cause. Here is a motive for preserving the sanctity of the Christian Church. The loss of it will not merely involve suffering to the Church herself; it will encourage the foes of Christ by giving them the elation of victory, and it will dishonour his Name by making his work appear to fail.

III. THE TRIUMPH OF THE FOE OVER A SOUL. There are spiritual enemies watching for every slip that a soul may make, enemies that are confounded by its growing purity and faithfulness, but rendered insolent and jubilant by its fall. Whenever we sin we afford a triumph to the evil one. We think that we are pleasing ourselves. But there must be some mistake or our sin would not give so much satisfaction to our enemy. The laugh of Mephistopheles should have been a warning to Faust. Perhaps the most stinging smart of future retribution will be the devilish glee with which the miserable lost soul will be welcomed into the place of darkness.

Ver. 17.—*Ruin from God.* In the fifteenth and sixteenth verses we find strangers and enemies indulging in unseemly jubilation over the fall of Jerusalem. Now, we see —what they do not see—that the cause of that fall was the direct action of God. This fact aggravates the dismay and wretchedness of the suffering city, for it signifies that her own King and Friend has brought about her ruin—not outsiders and antagonists. God himself has handed her over to the contempt and derision of the world. At the same time, the sight of God's hand in the calamity reveals the folly of the world's triumph. How shallow and ignorant that appears to be directly the veil which covers the awful action of God is lifted! Man's spite and malice sink into insignificance before the awful wrath of God, as the growling of beasts of the forest is drowned in the dread roar of thunder. The triumph of man is also shown to be misplaced. Man has not done the deed. He is but a spectator. This is a dread work of God. Let human passion be hushed before the solemn sight.

I. GOD BRINGS RUIN. This is a terrible statement. Looking at the particulars of the action itself, we see only the more of its horrors as we observe: 1. God does it *deliberately.* He devises it—plans, considers, and calmly executes the ruin. 2. God does it *in fulfilment of his Word.* "In the days of old" the ruin is threatened. The storm is long in brewing. An ancient promise makes the coming of it certain. 3. God does it *by authority.* He "had commanded" it. With all the authority and power of divinity over innumerable agents bending in perfect compliance to his will, God executes his solemn threat. 4. He does it *destructively.* He throws down. This shows violence and hurt. 5. He does it, to all human appearance, *pitilessly.* There is nothing visible that might mitigate the blow. No acts of mercy are seen to alleviate the misery. 6. He does it *to the satisfaction of enemies.* "He hath caused

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thine enemy to rejoice over thee," etc. This is the most sure sign that the ruin is complete.

II. THE FACT THAT GOD BRINGS RUIN IS NOT INCONSISTENT WITH HIS CHARACTER. It appears to be so, for it represents the Creator as a destroyer, and the God of love as a God of enmity. The difficulty should be examined. Then some light may break upon it. 1. *The goodness of God makes him the enemy of all evil.* He would cease to be good if he became universally complacent. As a righteous Judge he must condemn sin; even the Son of man, the Saviour of the world, had a mission of destruction. He came with fan to winnow out the chaff, and fire to burn it; he came to destroy the works of the devil. 2. *God makes external ruin that he may produce internal salvation.* He destroys the city that he may save the citizens. Jerusalem is overthrown in order that the Jews, through this chastisement, may be delivered from the ruin of their souls. So God breaks up a man's home and wrecks his hopes and flings him on the ash-heap of misery, in a merciful design to urge him to repentance and so to save the man himself. 3. *God is more concerned with the goodness than with the pleasure of his creature.* He certainly does not show the mild benevolence that characterizes some sanguine philanthropists. A safe house and abundance of bread are not the greatest things to be preserved, because pleasure and comfort are not the first requisites of the soul. Pain and loss may be blessings if they lead to purity and obedience. It is well for this life's pleasure to be ruined if thereby the soul is saved for life eternal.

Ver. 19.—*A cry to God in the night watches.* A fearful picture! Jerusalem is besieged. Famine is becoming fatal. Young children are seen fainting for hunger at the top of every street. The hearts of their parents are rent with anguish, as the little ones beg piteously of their mothers for food and drink (ver. 12), and none can be had, so that they swoon for very weakness. Suddenly a new turn is taken. The citizens have sunk down in sullen despair. Night has come like a cloak to cover the scenes of misery and death. Then a voice rings through the darkness, "Arise, cry out." This voice bids all hearers pour out their hearts in prayer to God.

I. THE CRY IS TO GOD. Hitherto we have had nothing but doleful lamentations. The language has been that of hopeless grief and bitter regret. No relief has been found or even sought. But there is one refuge in the direst trouble, and now that refuge is remembered. When we can do nothing else we can cry to God, for he is near though hidden from view, and merciful though striking in wrath, and able to save though no way of escape seems possible. It needs some rousing of the soul thus to seek God. We must "Arise." Spiritual lethargy is the worst consequence of sorrow. Let us beware lest our troubles paralyze our prayers. Prayer implies spiritual wakefulness.

II. THE CRY IS IN THE NIGHT. 1. *The time when trouble seems most hopeless.* It is in the night that the mourner weeps his most bitter tears. 2. *The time of reflection.* In lonely night watches the troubled soul has time for thought, and thought is then pain. 3. *The time of earthly darkness.* Then, perhaps, the spirit may feel most closely the nearness of the Father of spirits. The cry is to be in the beginning of the watches—either at the first watch or at the opening of each of the three watches. Let prayer come first. Let us not waste time in lamenting before we seek relief from God.

III. THE CRY IS HEARTFELT AND CONFIDENTIAL. "Pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord." 1. It comes from the *heart.* All real prayer must be the outcome of true and deep feelings. 2. It is *a full and free confidence in God.* The heart is poured out like water. This is in itself a relief. God expects our complete confidence and will hear prayer only when we give it to him. 3. It is no more than *the pouring out of the heart before God.* There is no definite request. Perhaps it is difficult to know how to ask for relief. Perhaps the grief is too overwhelming for any such thoughts of aid to be entertained. But it is enough that the whole trouble is poured out before God and left with him. Prayer is too often a dictating to God. It should be more of a simple confidence in God. It would be better if there were more confession and confidence, and less exact petition and definition of what God is to do in order to please us. We are to pour out our hearts and leave all with him. Then he will do the best for us. 4. *In deep trouble heartfelt prayer is wrung out of the sufferer.* Then he must be real. Sorrow melts the stony heart which has held itself in proud

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reserve, and thus it pours out itself like water. We have the example of Christ, whose agony passed into prayer, to urge us to find the relief of confiding fully in God.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*The anger of the Lord.* Men have fallen into two opposite extremes of opinion and of feeling with regard to the anger of the Lord. There have been times when they have been wont to attribute to the Eternal the passions of imperfect men, when they have represented the holy God as moved by the storms of indignation, as subject to the impulses of caprice and the instigations of cruelty. But in our own days the tendency is the contrary to this; men picture God as all amiability and forbearance, as regarding the sinful and guilty with indifference, or at all events without any emotion of displeasure. Scripture warrants neither of these extremes.

I. THERE ARE OCCASIONS WHEN GOD IS ANGRY WITH EVEN THE OBJECTS OF HIS SPECIAL FAVOUR. Jerusalem was the "daughter of Zion;" the temple was "the beauty of Israel;" the ark was God's "footstool." But as even human love is not necessarily or justly blind to the faults of those beloved, so the Lord is displeased with those whom he has endowed with peculiar privileges and blessings, when they are unmindful of his mercies and disobedient to his laws. "As many as I love," says the Divine Head of the Church, "I rebuke and chasten."

I. FROM THE HEARTS OF THE DISOBEDIENT GOD HIDES HIMSELF AS IN A CLOUD. When the sun is concealed behind a cloud, nature is chill, dull, and gloomy. The Lord is the Sun in whose light his people find joy and peace; when he hides his face they are troubled, for no longer is it the case that "they look unto him and are lightened." The heart and conscience of those who have offended God are overcast with spiritual gloom and unhappiness. So Israel found it; and there are none who have known the blessedness of God's fellowship and favour who can bear without distress the withdrawal of the heavenly light.

III. UPON THE HEADS OF THE REBELLIOUS GOD HURLS THE BOLT OF HIS DISPLEASURE. The tempest long lowered over the doomed city; at last it broke in fury, and Jerusalem became a prey to the spoiler and was cast down to the ground. The prophet clearly saw, what in an age of ease and luxury men are prone to forget, that there is a righteous Ruler from whose authority and retributive power no state and no soul can escape. "God is angry with the wicked every day." Yet in the midst of wrath he remembers mercy, and the penalties he inflicts answer their purpose if they lead to submission and to sincere repentance.—T.

Vers. 6, 7.—*Retribution in Church and state.* There are occasions when it is well to ponder seriously the calamities which befall a nation, to lay them to heart, to inquire into their causes, and to seek earnestly and prayerfully the way of deliverance, the means of remedy. "They that lack time to mourn lack time to mend."

I. IT IS WELL TO LOOK THROUGH NATIONAL DISASTERS TO THE PROVIDENTIAL RULE WHICH ALONE FULLY EXPLAINS THEM. The ruin which overtook Jerusalem and Judah was wrought by the armies of the Chaldeans. But the inspired prophet saw in the Assyrian hosts the ministers of Divine justice. The sufferings of the Jews were not accidental; they were a chastening, a discipline, appointed by the Lord of hosts, the King of kings. The Eternal had a controversy with his people. They had not listened to his Word, and therefore he spoke to them in thunder.

II. THE POLITICAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITIES OF A NATION ARE ALIKE RESPONSIBLE FOR NATIONAL SINS. The kings and chiefs had sought their own honour and ease and prosperity. The priests and prophets had discharged their offices in a manner perfunctory and formal. Under their natural and appointed leaders the nation had erred, had lapsed into idolatry, into sensuality, into practical unbelief. Rulers had not ruled in equity; teachers had not taught with faithfulness and fearlessness. Like king, like subjects; like priest, like people. All were to blame, but those were most culpable whose responsibility was greatest.

III. CHURCH AND STATE ALIKE ENDURE THE PENALTIES OF TRANSGRESSION AND DISOBEDIENCE. 1. The picture of desolation, as regards the religious life of the people,

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is a very dark and dreary picture. The religious celebrations and festivals fall into neglect; the very sabbath is all but forgotten; the sacrifices cease to be offered upon the altar; the sanctuary is no longer the scene of sacred solemnities; the priests are despised. 2. The case is equally distressing as regards the political situation. The walls of the palaces are either broken down, or, instead of housing the princes of the land, afford quarters to the troops of the enemy. The royal family are consigned to humiliation and to scorn. And the temple and the city resound no longer with the praises of Jehovah, but with the brutal shouts of the Chaldean soldiery.—T.

Ver. 9.—*Law and prophecy suspended.* Judah was professedly and actually a theocracy. The form of government was a monarchy, but the true Ruler was Jehovah. Spiritual disobedience and rebellion were Judah's offences; and it was the natural outcome of perseverance in these that the Lord should withdraw his favour, and leave his people to eat of the bitter fruit of their own misguided planting. And it was one consequence of the Divine displeasure that the highest privileges Jehovah had bestowed, the most sacred and precious tokens of his presence, should be for a season withdrawn. It is the climax, as Jeremiah conceives it, of Judah's misfortunes, that "the Law is no more; her prophets also find no vision from the Lord."

I. THIS TEMPORARY PRIVATION WAS OF LOCAL AND NATIONAL PRIVILEGES. It was so far as the Law was Jewish, that it ceased to be observed in Jerusalem. When the city was in the possession of heathen troops, when the temple was in ruins, when the priesthood was in disgrace, there was no possibility of observing the ordinances which the Law prescribed. The sacrifices and festivals came to an end. There were none to observe them and none to minister. And it was so far as the prophet was a functionary of the time and place, that he ceased to utter the mind of the Eternal. There were prophets of the Captivity; but Jerusalem, the true home of this noble class of religious teachers, knew their voice no more. For them was no vision which they might see in the ecstasy of inspiration, and depict in glowing colours before the imagination of the attentive multitude.

II. THE ETERNAL LAW OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, THE EVER-LIVING WITNESS OF SPIRITUAL PROPHECY, CAN NEVER CEASE. The words, the commandments and prohibitions, the outward ordinances, might pass away for a season of Divine displeasure, might be absorbed in the fuller revelation of the gospel. But the principles of the moral law, the obligations of unchanging righteousness, can never cease; for they are the expression of the mind and will of him whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. The vision may no longer be granted to the seer of Jerusalem; the city may stone her prophets or the Lord himself remove them. But every purified eye shall through all time behold God's glory, and the ear that is open to truth and love shall not cease to recognize the still, small voice of Heaven.—T.

Ver. 13.—*Commiseration.* The spirit of the prophet deserves our warm admiration. Jerusalem, its king and its citizens, had treated him with injustice and indignities. But in the day when his predictions were fulfilled and the city was overwhelmed by disaster and humiliation, so far from boasting over her, Jeremiah regarded her state with profoundest pity. Observe in this verse—

I. THE AFFECTIONATE AND ADMIRING LANGUAGE BY WHICH THE PROPHET DESIGNATES THE AFFLICTED CITY. Not a word of insult or of contempt, but, on the contrary, language evincing the deepest, the fondest interest. The population that had so despised his prophecy and had treated him so ill is here personified in language apparently more appropriate to times of prosperity. Jeremiah bewails the state of the daughter of Jerusalem, the virgin daughter of Zion.

II. THE TENDER COMMISERATION OF THE PROPHET WITH THE CITY'S WOES. 1. He pronounces the sorrows of Jerusalem *unequalled.* It is a common mode of expressing sympathy to assure the afflicted that others have the same griefs and trials to endure. No such consolation is offered here; the prophet looks around in vain for a case so distressing. The breach is "great like the sea." This is either a figure drawn from the vastness of the ocean, with which the great woe of Judah is compared; or it depicts the enemy as rushing in upon Jerusalem, as the sea in its fury makes a breach in the wall of a low-lying territory, and, sweeping the defences away by irresistible force,

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creates a desolation, so that a waste of waters is beheld where villages and fruitful fields once smiled in peace and plenty. 2. He pronounces the sorrows of Jerusalem *irremediable.* A mortal wound has been inflicted, which no leechcraft can heal. If Jerusalem is again to flourish it must be by a revival from the dead. For nothing now can save her.

APPLICATION. 1. The captive city is a picture of the desolation and misery to which (sooner or later) sin will surely bring all those who submit themselves to it. 2. The commiseration shown by the prophet is an example of the state of mind with which the pious should contemplate the ravages of sin and the wretchedness of sinful men. 3. The gospel forbids despondency over even the most utter debasement and humiliation of man. "There is balm in Gilead; there is a Physician there."—T.

Ver. 15.—*The glory and the shame of Jerusalem.* Contrast with misery escaped heightens the joy of the rescued and the happy; and, on the other hand, contrast with bygone prosperity adds to the wretchedness of those who are fallen from high estate.

I. THE BEAUTY AND RENOWN OF JERUSALEM IN ITS PROSPERITY. Into these many elements entered. 1. Its *situation* was superb. Nature pointed out the heights of Zion for a metropolis. Especially when beheld from the brow of Olivet the city impresses every traveller with admiration. 2. Its *history* and memorable associations. Won by the valour of David, adorned by the magnificence of Solomon, the home of heroes and of saints, this city possessed a fascination with which few cities of the earth could compare. 3. Its *sacred edifice* ranked alone, far above all the temples of the ancient world. Not that its architecture was commanding or beautiful in the highest degree; but that its erection, its dedication, the presence of the Eternal, all lent an interest and a sacredness to the peerless building. 4. Its *sacrifices* and *festivals*, which were attended by hundreds of thousands of worshippers, were altogether unique.

II. THE DISGRACE OF JERUSALEM. This appears: 1. From its ruinous and almost uninhabitable condition. 2. From the slaughter or dispersion of its citizens. 3. From its degradation from its proud position as the metropolis of a nation. 4. From the hatred, scorn, and insults of its triumphant enemies.

APPLICATION. There is a day of visitation which it behoves every child of privilege and mercy to use aright. To neglect that day is surely to entail a bitter overtaking by the night of calamity and destruction.—T.

Vers. 18, 19.—*The entreaty of anguish.* This surely is one of those passages which justify the title of this book; these utterances are "lamentations" indeed; never did human sorrow make of language anything more resembling a wail than this.

I. THE SOULS FROM WHICH TEARFUL ENTREATIES ARISE. The true language of passion—this utterance is lacking in coherence. The heart of the people cries aloud; the very walls of the city are invoked in their desolation to call upon the Lord. Clearly the distress is that of the inhabitants of the wretched city, of those survivors whose fate is sadder than that of those who fell by the sword.

II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT OCCASION THE ENTREATY. 1. Personal want, suffering, and distress. 2. The spectacle of the woes of others, especially of children. Literature has no more agonizing picture than this of the young children fainting and dying of hunger in every street.

III. THE BEING TO WHOM THE SUPPLICATIONS OF THE ANGUISHED ARE ADDRESSED. In such circumstances vain is the help of man. Upon whom shall Jerusalem call but upon the Lord, the King of the city, the great Patron and Protector of the chosen nation, who has forsaken even his own people because they have forgotten him, and in whose favour alone is hope of salvation?

IV. THE CHARACTER OF THE ENTREATY URGED. 1. It is *sorrowful*, accompanied by many tears, flowing like a river and pausing not. 2. *Earnest*, as appears from the description—heart, eyes, and hands all uniting in the appeal with imploring prayer. 3. *Continuous*; for not only by day, but through the night watches, supplications ascend unto heaven, invoking compassion and aid.—T.

Ver. 20.—*Consideration besought.* How truly human is this language! How real

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was the eternal Lord to him who could shape his entreaty thus! As if to urge a plea for pity, the prophet implores him who has been offended by the nation's sins, who has suffered the nation's misery and apparent ruin, to consider; to remember who Judah is, and to have mercy.

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT CALL FOR CONSIDERATION. 1. Famine and the inhuman conduct to which famine sometimes leads. 2. Death by the sword. 3. The privation of those religious offices which are the centre and inspiration of the nation's life. 4. The common suffering of all classes; prophet and priest, children and old men, virgins and youth, are alike overtaken by want, by wounds, by death.

II. THE GROUNDS UPON WHICH CONSIDERATION IS BEGGED FOR. 1. The main appeal is to Divine pity and benevolence. 2. The former mercies shown to Judah seem to be brought implicitly forward in this language. Israel has been chosen by God himself, favoured with privileges, delivered, protected, and blessed in a thousand ways. Will God cast off those in whom he has taken an interest so deep, for whom he has done so great things?

III. THE HOPE WITH WHICH CONSIDERATION IS ASKED. Hitherto the regard of God in recent events has been a regard of displeasure and of censure. But if the attitude of the stricken be no longer one of defiance, but of submission, it may be that the Lord will turn him again, will be favourable unto his afflicted people, will restore them to former prosperity, enriched with the precious lessons of their adverse experience.—T.

Ver. 1.—*The manifestation of Jehovah's wrath with Israel.* It will be noticed that the words "anger" and "wrath" occur again and again in these first three verses. Figure is heaped upon figure in order to bring out the practical effects of this anger. We need not pursue these figures into detail; each of them speaks for itself. Let us rather notice—

I. HOW THEY INDICATE THE EXTENT OF PAST FAVOUR. The very fact that, in order to show the character of Jehovah's anger, such strong figurative expressions are possible proves that in former days there had been many indications of his complacency with Israel. Not that Israel had been really better in the past than in the present, but she had to be dealt with in a long-suffering way, and the long-suffering of Jehovah is a quality which shows itself by abundance of most positive favours. God looked upon Israel according to the bright possibilities of excellence that lie in human nature. Israel did sink very low, but that was because she had the capacity of rising very high. Thus God heaped upon Israel favours, as if to show that he would not entertain any doubt as to her willingness to respond to his requests. And so the black anger-cloud resting on Israel's present looks blacker still when contrasted with the Divine brightness and clearness of Israel's past. God has cast down the beauty of Israel, and that casting is as from heaven to earth. That which God has not remembered in the day of his anger is something which he had reckoned useful to himself, even as the footstool is useful to the king seated on his throne. Thus the extent of present anger measures the extent of past favour.

II. HOW THESE FIGURES INDICATE THE REALITY OF JEHOVAH'S WRATH. The very heaping up of these strong figures should make us feel very deeply that God's wrath is not itself a figure. God's anger is not to be reduced to a mere anthropomorphism. We are misled in this matter, because human anger is never seen without selfish and degrading elements. An angry man, in all his excitement and violence, is a pitiable sight, but nevertheless it is possible for a man to be angry and sin not. The man who cannot understand the reality of God's anger will never comprehend the ideal of humanity. The sensitive musician would laugh to scorn any one who told him that, while he was pleased with harmony, he should not be disturbed by discord. Again and again Jesus was really and righteously angry, showing in this, not least, how he was partaker of the Divine nature. When we are in wrong ways and God is consequently against us, his opposition and displeasure must be shown in ways that cannot be mistaken.—Y.

Ver. 5.—*Jehovah reckoned as an enemy.* I. HOW FAR WAS THERE REALITY UNDER THIS APPEARANCE OF ENMITY? God might look like an enemy, but it did not therefore follow that he was one. But even if Jehovah behaved himself like an enemy, it must

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also be asked whether there was not a necessity that he should do so. If Israel had to say, "Jehovah acts as an enemy towards us," Jehovah had to say, "My people act as an enemy towards me." These people had now for a long time been travelling in the wrong way, and it was in the very nature of things that the more they advanced the more opposition should multiply and become intensified. God not only appeared to be an enemy, but in certain respects he really was an enemy. He hated the evil that had risen to such a height among those whom he had taken for his own. Our love for evil is ever the measure of his hate of it; and the more determined we are to cling to it, the more his hostility will appear. God himself always keeps in the same path of law and righteousness and order. When we, according to our measure, follow in his footsteps, then real opposition there cannot be; but the moment we think fit to become a law to ourselves and do what is right in our own eyes, then inevitably he must oppose us.

II. THIS ENMITY WAS LARGELY IN APPEARANCE ONLY. When Israel said that Jehovah was as an enemy, they got their idea of enmity from the hostile proceedings of individuals and communities. But God cannot be the enemy of any man as men are enemies one to another. His motives are different and so are the results of all his opposition. One man forming hostile plans against another acts from malicious motives, or at all events from selfish ones. There is no basis of reason in what he does. He is not hostile to the lower in order that he may show himself friendly to the higher. Besides, we must not look merely at outward manifestations of enmity. There may be the deepest enmity and greatest power of inflicting injury where outwardly all looks harmless. Those who profess to be our friends and whom we reckon to be our friends may yet inflict worse injuries than all avowed enemies taken together. God is the true Friend of every man, however he may be thought at times to put on the appearance of an enemy.—Y.

Ver. 9.—*The prophetic office suspended.* There is something of a climax about this statement that the prophets find no vision from Jehovah. Jeremiah has already spoken of God destroying the outward resources and defences of Jerusalem. Next, he mentions the exile of the king and the chief men, and then, as if to hint that it was a still greater calamity, he tells us how the prophet had no longer anything to see or to say. He did well to magnify his own office; for no office could be more important than that of the man whom God chose to communicate needed messages to his fellow-men. Observe—

I. THE NATURE OF THE PROPHETIC OFFICE AS HERE INDICATED. A prophet was one who had a vision from the Lord. He was no prophet unless he could truly preface his address with "Thus saith the Lord." And must there not be something of this kind still? With respect to Divine things, what can any of us say that shall have power and blessing in it unless as we speak of what God has made us see? The prophetic office has ceased, but who can doubt that there must be some permanent reality corresponding with it? and therefore we should ever be on the look out for men who have had visions from the Lord. All advances in the interpretation of Scripture truth must come by revelation from on high. Otherwise the most diligent searching ends in nothing but pedantry and verbosity.

II. NOTICE THE DEPRIVATION HERE SPOKEN OF. What does it mean? How is it to be looked upon as part of Jerusalem's punitive visitation? The reply to this is that the institution of prophecy was part of the honour which Jehovah had put upon his people. The people could say that God was constantly raising up amongst them those whom he chose for a medium of communication. However unwilling they might be to listen to the real prophets, and however they persecuted them, still the fact remained that men like Jeremiah were rising again and again. For all we can tell, those whose written prophecies remain may have been a most minute portion numerically of the total company of the prophets. Now, if all at once the prophetic voice ceased or came at long intervals and with few words, this must have been most significant to those who had power to notice. It meant that God had little or nothing to say to the people. That he had communications with every individual willing to put himself in a right attitude there can be no doubt. Prophets who received nothing to give as a message would at the same time receive all they needed for their own edification and comfort, and now there is an abiding vision for all. God's communications to us are not after

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the "sundry times and divers manners" mode referred to at the beginning of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The Spirit of God revealing the uplifted Christ makes every one of us a prophet to himself.—Y.

Ver. 10.—*The silence of the elders.* I. THEIR FORMER SPEECH. They are said to keep silence now; this, of course, suggests that silence had not been their former habit. Old men have a peculiar right to speak, are often expected to speak, and can always plead that years have given them experience and many opportunities of observation, and with respect to these particular elders here it is not difficult to imagine what the *topics* and the *manner* of their former speech might be. For instance, imagine younger men going to them and asking what their opinion was as to the predictions of Jeremiah. They would not all have the same opinion, but many, it is to be feared, would make very light of what he said. Nor is it likely that they spoke of him in a very considerate way. The elders of Israel were, according to a national custom, largely the teachers of history. It was their business to tell their sons and their son's sons the great things that had been done in the days of old. And we know how easy it is to remember only success and forget disaster. Jeremiah coming in with his denunciations and threatenings would exasperate the elders not least. The chances are that again and again they had given advice at the foundation of which lay their unbelief in Jeremiah. Besides this, they would be advisers in general, and in particular matters would often be right enough. Thus when they cast discredit on a prophet of Jehovah others would take up their words as words of authority and soberness.

II. THEIR PRESENT SILENCE. They neither speak of their own accord nor do they answer when addressed. They keep silence. It is the silence of grief, humiliation, wounded pride, and shame. The only thing they could say, if they did speak, would be to confess in the amplest manner their sins, their blunders, their egregious self-confidence. But in truth their very silence spoke as if with loudest voice. It was as if they said, "We abdicate any right we have had to advise and lead. We admit to the full our responsibility in having done so much to bring disaster on the people." Old age is not necessary to bring wisdom and insight into the problems of life. Jeremiah, who had gone out to prophesy when little better than a lad, was right, and old men with an egotistical and absorbed confidence in their own opinions were wrong. If we would avoid being stricken with a shameful silence in our old age, it must be by listening obediently in earlier years to far other voices than those which come from the promptings of the natural man.—Y.

Ver. 12.—*The suffering of the children.* It must be noticed how the mention of the children follows on the mention of the elders. There is suffering at each extreme of life, and hence we are to infer that there is suffering all between. The elders suffer in their way and the children and the sucklings suffer in theirs. The elders are bowed down with confusion, shame, and disappointment. The children know nothing of this, but they are tormented with the pangs of hunger; and what a pathetic touch is that which represents them as breathing out their little lives into the bosom of their mothers! The sins of the parents are being visited upon the children. It has often been represented as a monstrous iniquity that things should be put in such a light, but is it not an undeniable fact that the little ones suffer what they would not suffer if progenitors always did what was right? These children were not clamouring for dainties and luxuries. Corn and wine, the common food, the pleasant grape-juice, what they had been used to and what all at once they began to miss. What is here said is a strong admonition to us to consider how the innocent and unsuspecting may be affected by our unrighteousness. All our conduct *must* affect others, and it *may* affect those who cannot lift a hand to avert ill consequences. The sufferings of children and infants, the immense mortality among them,—these are things awful to contemplate; and yet nothing can be more certain than that the clearing away of prejudice and ignorance and hurtful habits founded on bare tradition would bring into child-life that abundance of joy which a loving Creator of human nature meant children to attain. But even with all the suffering there are compensations. These hunger-stricken children cried for bread, and getting none they poured out their lives into their mothers' bosoms; but they had no self-reproach. Remorse did not add another degree of agony

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to starvation. The suffering which touches the conscience is the worst, and the little ones escape it altogether.—Y.

Ver. 14.—*The share of the prophets in ruining Jerusalem.* I. WHAT THE PROPHET OUGHT TO BE. The prophet of those times was a man bound to say things having depth and substance in them. And though the prophet has ceased, so far as formal office is concerned, yet there are still Divine things to be seen, and, when seen, spoken about by those qualified to speak. There are the deep things of God to be penetrated and explored by those willing to receive the insight. The Holy Spirit of God, offered so abundantly through Christ, is a Spirit of prophecy to all who have it. They need no formal prophet, inasmuch as they have a word, living and piercing, to all who take a right relation towards it. God means us to be occupied with serious, substantial matters, so large and deep and fruitful that we shall never outgrow our interest in them. The heart of man in its meditating power was made for great themes. The heart can never be *filled* with mere trifles. That is good advice given to preachers of the gospel to speak most on the greatest themes, such as are set forth again and again in the Scriptures, and, whether these things be preached about or not, every individual Christian should think about them. For while we cannot secure the topics of preachers, the topics of our own thoughts depend upon ourselves. It is just those who concern themselves a great deal about dogmas who are also most interested in the details of life and conduct.

II. WHAT THE PROPHET MAY SINK TO BE. These prophets felt bound to magnify their office and say something. They ought to have spoken the truth; but for this they lacked inclination and perhaps courage. The next best thing would have been to remain silent; but then where would the prophet-reputation have been? and, more serious question still with some, what would have become of the prophet-emoluments? Hence we have here the double iniquity that the false was spoken and the true concealed. The prophets could only get credit for their falsehoods by a careful concealment of the truth. They had, as it were, to paste on truth a conspicuous label, proclaiming far and wide, "This is a lie." This verse suggests how they had the common experience of one lie leading on to another. The true prophet said that the burden Israel had to bear and the exile into which it had to go arose from its iniquities. Whereas the false, or rather the unfaithful prophet, having set iniquity as the cause of trouble altogether on one side, could only go on inventing explanations which explained nothing. Ezek. xiii. is a chapter which may very profitably be read in connection with this verse. The great lesson is to search for truth no matter with what toil, and keep it no matter at what cost.—Y.

Ver. 22.—*The completeness of Jehovah's visitation.* I. THE COMPARISON BY WHICH THIS IS SET FORTH. "Thou hast called as in a solemn day." At certain periods there were vast commanded gatherings of the people to Jerusalem. They came from far and wide and from all parts of the compass, and so, as they converged upon Jerusalem, they might be justly said to encircle it. And encircling it, they did so with a definite purpose. They were as far as possible from being a mere promiscuous crowd, in which each one could come and go at his own sweet will. At the centre of the circle stood Jehovah, giving the commandment to each which brought them all together. And we may infer from the use of the comparison here that the commandment must have been generally complied with. It was, indeed, a commandment not very hard to obey, requiring as it did mere outwardness of obedience. People living in quiet country places would be glad of the reason for occasional visits to Jerusalem. Well would it have been if the people had tried to carry their obedience a little further! if, when the solemn assemblies had gathered together, there had been in them the right spirit! A gathering of bodies is not so hard, but a gathering of hearts in complete union and sympathy, perfectly responsive to the will of God, who shall secure that?

II. THE ASSEMBLY OF TERRORS AT GOD'S COMMAND. God called together the people, and they came; but when they came, instead of attending to God's will, they pursued their own. But now God is represented as calling together all the agents that can inflict pain upon man and cause him terror; and they come with one consent, folding Israel round with an environment which cannot be escaped. There is no ultimate escape for

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the selfish, sinful man. He may get the evil day put off; he may find gate after gate opening, as he thinks, to let him away from trouble and pain; but in truth he is only going deeper and deeper into the corner where he will be completely shut up. God can surround us with providences and protections if we are willing to trust him. No other power can *surround* us with causes of terror. Our own hearts may imagine a menacing circle, but it only exists in imagination. If we seek the Lord he will hear us and deliver us from all our fears (Ps. xxxiv. 4). But no one can deliver us from God's just wrath with all who are unrighteous. That God who breaks the circle with which his enemies seek to enclose his friends, also makes a circle in which those enemies must themselves be effectually enclosed.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER III.

Vers. 1—21.—MONOLOGUE SPOKEN BY AN INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER WHOSE FATE IS BOUND UP WITH THAT OF THE NATION; OR PERHAPS BY THE NATION PERSONIFIED (see Introduction).

Ver. 1.—**Seen.** "To see" in Hebrew often means "to experience;" *e.g.* Jer. v. 12; Ps. xvi. 10; Eccles. viii. 16. **By the rod of his wrath.** The idea is, not that Babylon has humbled Israel as Jehovah's instrument, but that God himself has brought these troubles upon his people. "He hath led me, hath hedged me about," etc.

Ver. 3.—**Is he turned; he turneth;** rather, *he turneth again and again.*

Ver. 4.—**Made old;** more literally, *worn away,* as a garment (comp. Isa. l. 9; li. 6). **Broken my bones.** So Job complains, "His wrath teareth and persecuteth me" (Job xvi. 9); and, a still closer parallel, Hezekiah, "As a lion, so will he break all my bones" (Isa. xxxviii. 13). Comp. Ps. li. 8, "The bones which thou hast broken."

Ver. 5.—**He hath builded against me, and compassed** me. A figure from the siege of a town. **Gall.** For the true meaning of the word, see on Jer. viii. 14. We need not trouble ourselves about it here, for the word is evidently used as a kind of "ideograph" for bitterness. **Travel;** literally, *weariness.*

Ver. 6.—This verse is verbally reproduced in Ps. cxliii. 3. **In dark places;** *i.e.* in Hades (comp. Ps. lxxxviii. 7). **As** they that be **dead of old.** A strange comparison; for what difference can it make whether the dead are men of the ancient or the modern world? The rendering, however, though perfectly admissible, is less suitable to the context than *as they that are for ever dead;* who have entered "the land from which there is no return" (an Assyrian title of Hades). Comp. "the everlasting house," *i.e.* the grave (Eccles. xii. 5), "the everlasting sleep" (Jer. li. 39, 57).

Vers. 7—9.—Three figures, interrupted by a literal statement of the ill success of prayer. A traveller who finds himself suddenly caged up by a high thorn hedge (comp. Job iii. 23; Hos. ii. 6). A prisoner with a heavy chain. Again, a traveller suddenly shut up by solid stone walls (comp. Hos. ii. 8).

Ver. 7.—**My chain;** literally, *my brass* (comp. Judg. xvi. 21; 2 Kings xxv. 7).

Ver. 8.—**He shutteth out my prayer.** There is a kind of barrier through which these futile prayers cannot penetrate (comp. on ver. 44).

Ver. 9.—**Inclosed;** or, *walled up;* the participle of this verb is rendered "masons" in the Authorized Version of 2 Kings xii. 12. **Made my paths crooked;** *i.e.* hath compelled me to walk in byways (comp. margin of the Authorized Version, Judg. v. 6). But this hardly seems appropriate to the context. The *semitas meas subvertit* of the Vulgate is preferable. Render, therefore, *turned my path upside down* (comp. Isa. xxiv. 1). An analogous expression in Job xxx. 13 is rendered in the Authorized Version, "they mar my path." Thenius thinks that the destruction of a raised causeway is the figure intended; but the word is quite correctly rendered "paths;" see the note of Delitzsch on Isa. lix. 8.

Ver. 10.—Was; rather, *is.* **As a bear . . . as a lion.** The comparison of the enemy to a lion is not uncommon; see *e.g.* Jer. iv. 7; v. 6 (see note); xlix. 19; l. 44; Ps. x. 9; xvii. 12; Job x. 16. The bear is only once mentioned in such a context (Hos. xiii. 8). The two latter passages may possibly have been in the mind of the writer, as Jehovah is in both the subject of the comparison.

Ver. 11.—**Hath turned aside my ways;** *i.e.* hath caused me to go astray. Comp. Ps. cxlvi. 9, "The way of the ungodly he maketh crooked," *i.e.* he leadeth them to destruction. **Made me desolate;** or, *made me stunned* ("astonied," Ezra ix. 3 in our Bible). So ch. i. 13, 16.

Ver. 12.—**Set me as a mark.** Precisely as Job complains of Jehovah, "He hath set me up for his mark" (Job xvi. 13).

Ver. 13.—This verse seems strangely short—it consists of only four words in the Hebrew. Probably something like "his

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weapons," or "the weapons of death" (Ps. vii. 13), has fallen out. Restore them, and the verse becomes a two-membered one, like its companions. **To enter into my reins.** So Job (xvi. 12), "He cleaveth my reins asunder." "Reins," equivalent to "inward parts," like "heart," with which it is often combined; *e.g.* Jer. xi. 20; xvii. 10; xx. 12.

Ver. 14.—**A derision to all my people.** If the text-reading is correct, these are the words of Jeremiah (or one like Jeremiah), describing the ill return accorded to his friendly admonitions. But the Massora mention Ps. cxliv. 2; 2 Sam. xxii. 44; ch. iii. 14, as passages in which "my people" is used, whereas we should expect "peoples." The Syriac Version of our passage actually translates "to all peoples," and the prefixed "all" certainly favours the plural, and so, in a far higher degree, does the view we have been led to adopt of the speaker of this Lamentation (see Introduction). The correction (*'ammîm* for *'ammî*) has been received by Archbishop Secker, by Ewald, and by J. Olshausen. **Their song.** A reminiscence of Job xxx. 9.

Ver. 15.—**With bitterness**; literally, *with bitternesses*; i.e. bitter troubles. A reminiscence of Job ix. 18. **With wormwood**; *i.e.* with a drink of wormwood (comp. Jer. ix. 15; xxiii. 15). We are slightly reminded of Ps. lxix. 21, "They gave me gall for my meat."

Ver. 16.—**He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones**; *i.e.* he hath (unnatural as it may seem in Israel's Father) given me stones instead of bread (comp. Matt. vii. 9). The Jewish rabbi commonly called Rashi thinks that a historical fact is preserved in these words, and that the Jewish exiles were really obliged to eat bread mixed with grit, because they had to bake in pits dug in the ground. So too many later commentators, *e.g.* Grotius, who compares a passage of Seneca ('De Benefic.,' ii. 7), "Beneficium superbè datum simile est pani lapidoso." **He hath covered me with ashes**; rather, *he hath pressed me down into ashes.* A figurative expression for great humiliation. So in the Talmud the Jewish nation is described as "pressed down into ashes" ('Bereshith Rabba,' 75).

Ver. 17.—**Thou hast removed my soul**; rather, *thou hast rejected my soul.* The words look like a quotation from Ps. lxxxviii. 14 (Hebrew, 15), where they are undoubtedly an address to Jehovah. But there is another rendering, which grammatically is equally tenable, and which avoids the strangely abrupt address to God, viz. *My soul is rejected (from peace).*

Vers. 19—21.—These verses prepare the way for a brief interval of calmness and resignation.

Ver. 19. — **Remembering**; rather, *remember.* It is the language of prayer.

Ver. 20.—**My soul**, etc. This rendering is difficult. In the next verse we read, "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope," which seems inconsistent with ver. 20 as given in the Authorized Version. An equally grammatical and still more obvious translation is, *Thou (O God!) wilt surely remember, for my soul is bowed down within me.* The latter part of the line is a reminiscence of Ps. xlii. 5, at least, if the text be correct, for the closing words do not cohere well with the opening ones. The Peshito (Syriac) has, "Remember, and revive [literally, 'cause to return'] my soul within me," which involves a slightly different reading of one word. But more tempting than any other view of the meaning is that of Bickell, though it involves a correction and an insertion, "My soul remembereth well and meditateth on thy faithfulness."

Ver. 21.—**This I recall to my mind**, etc.; viz. that thou wilt remember me, or, thy faithfulness (ver. 20). Here again there appears to be a reminiscence of a passage in Ps. xlii. (ver. 4). Others suppose that "this" refers to the following verses; but in this case a new section would begin in the middle of a triad (the triad of verses beginning with *zayin*), which is certainly improbable.

Vers. 22—36.—RESIGNATION AND HOPEFULNESS.

Ver. 22.—**It is of the Lord's mercies**, etc.; literally, *The Lord's mercies that we are not consumed.* But the "we" is difficult, especially considering that in ver. 23 (which is clearly parallel) the subject of the sentence is, not "we," but "the Lord's mercies." Hence it is probable that the reading of the Targum and the Peshito (adopted by Thenius, Ewald, and Bickell) is correct, "The Lord's mercies, verily they cease not" (*tammû* for *tamnû*).

Ver. 24.—**The Lord is my Portion.** A reminiscence of Ps. xvi. 5 (comp. Ps. lxxiii. 26; cxix. 57; cxlii. 5).

Ver. 26.—**Should both hope and quietly wait**; rather, *should wait in silence.* "Silence" is an expression of the psalmist's (the Lamentations are psalms) for resignation to the will of God; comp. Ps. lxii. 1 (Hebrew, 2); lxv. 1 (Hebrew, 2), and see Authorized Version, margin. The thought of the verse is that of Ps. xxxvii. 7.

Ver. 27.—**In his youth.** The thought of this verse reminds us of Ps. cxix. 71. Youth is mentioned as the time when it is easier to adapt one's self to circumstances, and when discipline is most readily accepted. The words do not prove that the writer is young, any more than vers. 9 and

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100 of Ps. cxix. prove that the psalmist was an aged man (against this view, see vers. 84—87). There is no occasion, therefore, for the textual alteration (for as such I cannot help regarding it), "from his youth," found in some Hebrew manuscripts in Theodotion, in the Aldine edition of the Septuagint, and in the Vulgate. The reading was probably dictated by the unconscious endeavour to prop up the theory of Jeremiah's authorship. The scribes and translators remembered, inopportunely, that the trials of Jeremiah began in early manhood.

Vers. 28—30.—**He sitteth alone**, etc.; rather, *Let him sit alone . . . let him keep silence* (ver. 28) . . . *let him put* (ver. 29) . . . *let him give . . . let him be filled* (ver. 30). The connection is—since it is good for a man to be afflicted, let him sit still, when trouble is sent, and resign himself to bear it.

Ver. 28.—**Because he hath borne it**; rather, *when he* (viz. God) *hath laid it.*

Ver. 29.—**He putteth his mouth**, etc. An Oriental manner of expressing submission (comp. Micah vii. 17; Ps. lxxii. 9).

Ver. 30.—**He giveth his cheek.** Notice the striking affinity (which is hardly accidental) to Job xvi. 10; Isa. l. 6. The ideal of the righteous man, according to these kindred books, contains, as one of its most prominent features, the patient endurance of affliction; and so too does the same ideal, received and amplified by the greatest "Servant of Jehovah" (Matt. v. 39).

Vers. 31—33.—Two grounds of comfort: (1) the trouble is only for a time, and God will have compassion again (vers. 31, 32); and (2) God does not afflict in a malicious spirit (ver. 33).

Ver. 33.—**Willingly**; literally, *from his heart.*

Vers. 34—39.—These two triads form a transition to the renewed complaints and appeals for help in the following verses. The first triad is probably an amplification of the statement that "the Lord doth not afflict willingly." This being the case, the injustice which darkens human life cannot be approved by him.

Ver. 34.—**To crush**, etc. With manifest reference to the cruelties of the Babylonian conquerors of the Jews.

Ver. 35.—**Before the face of the Most High.** In ancient phraseology, to bring a case before the judges was to bring it "unto the deity" (*'el hā-'elōhīm*), Exod. xxi. 6; comp. xxii. 8; or (as the Septuagint in one passage paraphrases it, "unto God's judgment-place," *i.e.* to a sacred spot where judges held their session.

Ver. 36.—**Approveth not.** The sense is an excellent one, but it is very doubtful whether it can be obtained without altering one of the letters of the word in the text (reading *rāçāh* for *rā'āh*). The text-reading is, "the Lord seeth not." This may be explained either as "the Lord regardeth not (such things)," or as a question, "Doth not the Lord regard (this)?"

Vers. 37—54.—EXHORTATION TO REPENTANCE; RENDERED, LAMENTATION.

Vers. 37, 38.—True, God does not desire our misfortunes. But equally true is it that they do not happen without his express permission (comp. Isa. xlv. 7; Amos iii. 6).

Ver. 37.—**That saith, and it cometh to pass** (comp. Ps. xxxiii. 9; Gen. i. 3, etc.).

Ver. 39.—**Wherefore doth a living man complain**, etc.? The God of whom the poet speaks is the Searcher of hearts. Why, then, should a man complain when he knows that he deserves his punishment? The close of the verse should run, (*Let*) *a man* (*rather sigh*) *over his sins.*

Vers. 40—51.—Confession of sin, followed by sighs and groans.

Ver. 40.—**Let us search.** Our troubles being caused by our sins, let us search them out and correct them.

Ver. 41.—**Our heart with our hands.** It is to be sincere prayer; "spreading out the hands" is not enough by itself (Isa. i. 25).

Ver. 42.—**We . . . thou.** The pronouns are expressed in the Hebrew, and are meant to be spoken with emphasis.

Ver. 43.—**Thou hast covered with anger.** The clause seems imperfect; perhaps "thyself" has fallen out of the text (see next verse).

Ver. 44.—**That our prayer should not pass through.** So Isa. lviii. 4, "Ye do not so fast at this time as to make your voice to be heard on high;" Ps. lv. 1, "Hide not thyself from my supplication."

Vers. 46—48.—Here occurs a break in the alphabetic order, as these three verses begin, not, as they should, with *ayin*, but with *pe* (see Introduction).

Ver. 46.—This verse is almost a verbal repetition of the first line of ch. ii. 16.

Ver. 47.—**Fear and a snare.** An alliteration in the Hebrew, borrowed from Jer. xlviii. 43 (comp. Isa. xxiv. 17).

Ver. 48.—**Runneth down**, etc. (comp. ch. i. 16).

Ver. 49.—**Trickleth down**; rather, *poureth down.* **Ceaseth not**; literally, *is not silent* (comp. Jer. xiv. 17).

Ver. 51.—**Affecteth mine heart**; rather, *paineth me*; literally, *paineth my soul*, the soul being mentioned as the centre of the feelings and emotions. **The daughters of my city.** The sad fate of the virgins of Jerusalem oppressed the spirit of the writer (comp. ch. i. 4, 18; ii. 10, 21).

Vers. 52—66.—THE SPEAKER'S SUFFERINGS; AN EARNESTLY BELIEVING PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE. He speaks as a representative

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of the nation; if we should not rather say that the nation itself, personified, is the speaker. In the first triad some have supposed a reference to the persecution suffered by Jeremiah at the hands of his countrymen. The "dungeon," or rather "pit," will in this case be the "dungeon" ("pit") mentioned in Jer. xxxviii. 6. But a "pit" is a figure in the psalms for destruction (Ps. xl. 2; lxix. 15), and there is nothing recorded in Jeremiah as to the "princes" having cast stones at Jeremiah, or rolled a stone on to the top of the "pit." Besides, the "pit" into which the prophet was cast had "no water, but mire."

Ver. 52.—**Mine enemies . . . without cause.** These words ought to be connected, as in the Hebrew.

Ver. 54.—**I am cut off.** Some words have to be supplied, and Ps. xxxi. 22 suggests which these are:—"I am cut off from before thine eyes," *i.e.* from the region on which the eyes of God rest.

Ver. 55.—**I called.** Bunsen renders, "Then I called." But there is no connection indicated in the Hebrew between this and the preceding triad. **Out of the low dungeon**; literally, *out of the pit of the lower parts (of the earth)*—a phrase borrowed from Ps. lxxxviii. 6 (Hebrew, 7). Sheol, or Hades, is signified.

Ver. 56.—**At my breathing**; rather, *at my sighing*; literally, *at my relieving myself.*

Ver. 57.—**Thou drewest near**, etc. The sacred poet reminds Jehovah of his former gracious interpositions.

Ver. 58.—**Thou hast pleaded**, etc. The reference is still to a former state of things which came to an end. It would make this plainer if we were to alter the rendering, *Thou didst plead . . . thou didst redeem.* The speaker likens his case to that of a poor man who is opposed at law by a rich oppressor, and who, for want of an advocate, will, to all appearance, become his victim. Suddenly Jehovah appeared and supplied this want. Such are God's "wonders of old time."

Ver. 59.—**Thou hast seen my wrong.** Here the speaker returns to the present. This is clear from the following words: **Judge thou my cause.**

Ver. 62.—**The lips** stand here for "the fruit of the lips;" and the verb which governs the nouns is "thou hast heard," in the preceding verse.

Ver. 63.—**Their sitting down, and their rising up.** Elsewhere the phrase is a comprehensive expression for all a man's occupations (comp. Ps. cxxxix. 2; Isa. xxxvii. 28). **I am their music**; rather, *their song*; i.e. the subject of their taunting songs, p. in the parallel passage, Job xxx. 9; comas Ps. lxix. 12 (Hebrew, 13).

Ver. 64.—**Render unto them**, etc. The sacred poet is familiar with the psalms; here we have a condensation of Ps. xxviii. 4. The tone of vers. 64—66 reminds us of passages in the Book of Jeremiah (see Jer. xviii. 23; xx. 12).

Ver. 65.—**Sorrow of heart**; rather, *a covering of the heart*; spiritual blindness, like the "veil upon the heart" in 2 Cor. iii. 15. **Thy curse unto them.** This should rather form a separate interjectional clause, "Thy curse upon them!"

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—"*The man that has seen affliction.*" In the first and second chapters of Lamentations the desolation of the city of Jerusalem is described and deplored. The third chapter brings the picture to a focus by giving us the plaint of a single individual—either one typical or exceptionally distressed citizen, or the city regarded imaginatively as an afflicted man. Our sympathy is most moved by individual appeals. We are horrified by disasters that affect thousands; but we are more touched by the details of the suffering of one person. Nearness is requisite for sympathy, a nearness of view, at least, that enables us to see the humanity of the sufferer. Statistics of public distress do not so affect us as the sight of a few severe cases that are brought under our own eyes. We cannot pity "the masses;" we pity this man and that woman. Therefore we should bring ourselves into contact with the sufferers of our own neighbourhood, and not be content to follow only such promptings of benevolence as may arise from a distant survey of large fields of distress afforded by the formal reports of charitable institutions.

I. THE MAN THAT HAS SEEN AFFLICTION HAS CLAIMS UPON THE CONSIDERATION OF HIS FELLOW-MEN. The sufferer of Jerusalem arrests our attention. He has a right to do so. Great distress is by itself sufficiently important to demand our notice. Moral merit will add to the force of the appeal of suffering. But even where the merit is lacking the suffering itself still has claims upon us. We must not roughly shake off the obligations of sympathy by the observation that the client is ill deserving. If the

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ill desert mean that the complaint is false and the distress a sham, of course it is to be visited with contempt or punishment. But suppose, with evil character, there is also real distress. In such a case we should take the distress into consideration. We may not help in the same way in which we would assist a deserving case, for perhaps similar assistance would be wasted, or abused, or in some way harmful. But we must remember that charity is not limited by merit. Like the mercy of God to sinners, it should flow out to those whose only claim upon it is their want and woe. Great sorrow does not atone for sin, especially where it leaves the sufferer impenitent. But it does call for pity. Whether she were innocent or guilty, we feel deep compassion for such a victim of torture as Beatrice Cenci, and even imagine a certain sacredness about her solitary pre-eminence of distress that hushes all harsh judgments.

II. THE MAN THAT HAS SEEN AFFLICTION IS IN DANGER OF REGARDING HIS SUFFERINGS AS WITHOUT PARALLEL. He feels his own trouble more acutely than that of his neighbour. Thus he comes to regard himself as exceptionally distressed. Pain is a good school in which to learn sympathy with others in similar trouble. But the sympathy is commonly attained after one's own agony is lulled. It comes with the recollection of it called up by the sight of the present distress outside us. But while pain is being endured, especially if it is very acute, it tends to make the sufferer selfish for the time being. At least it wraps him up in himself and makes him magnify the severity of his own lot in comparison with that of other people. Let us be on our guard against this illusion, and the unkindness to others and murmuring and despair of ourselves which may come out of it.

III. THE MAN THAT HAS SEEN AFFLICTION HAS GAINED KNOWLEDGE OF SOME OF THE DEEPEST FACTS OF LIFE. We do not know life till we have felt pain. Buddha, while kept from all suffering in his palace, was ignorant of the world and of man. Suffering opens the eyes to the facts of life and breaks up many idle dreams. Mere show and pretence are then felt to be vain and mocking. True friends are discriminated from idle acquaintances. The value of inward things is discovered.

IV. THE MAN THAT HAS SEEN AFFLICTION HAS EXPERIENCED A VALUABLE DISCIPLINE. This is a useful "means of grace." It may be sent to punish sin and check the thoughtless sinner on his road to ruin. Or it may be to remind the careless Christian of his declension. Or it may be like the pruning of the fruitful branch, a stimulus to make the fruitful Christian more fruitful. Various ends may be served. But in all cases the suffering is meant for our good. Nevertheless, the enjoyment of the advantage aimed at in the providential arrangement depends on the use we make of our trouble. We may receive this grace in vain. If we harden our heart under it it will be useless to us. Such a result is doubly disappointing, for we do not escape the pain, yet we come out of the ordeal worse instead of better.

V. THE MAN THAT HAS SEEN AFFLICTION IS A TYPE OF CHRIST. Like "the Servant of the Eternal," in the latter part of "Isaiah," this unnamed sufferer of the Lamentations seems to foreshadow the unique distress of the Man of sorrows. Christ claims our attention by his suffering, and the more that he suffered for us. He did not simply imagine his distresses to be great. He never posed for pity. But never was sorrow like unto his sorrow. He entered deeply into human experience by his sufferings, and became a High Priest touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Made perfect by suffering, he gives to us the fruits of his cross and passion as more than a "means of grace"—as bread of life and blood of redemption.

Ver. 6.—"*Dark places.*" The sufferer feels as though he were in the dark places of the dead, in the everlasting house which no tenant ever quits.

I. GOD SOMETIMES SETS HIS PEOPLE IN DARK PLACES. He permits the light of gladness to fade and the vision of truth to be dimmed and the conscious brightness of his presence to be lost, so that the soul is plunged in black depths of sorrow, doubt, and loneliness. Then the dismayed sufferer feels himself lost, well-nigh dead. But he is not dead, nor even deserted by God. The very fact that he admits that *God* has set him in the dark place is a confession that the hand of God has been with him. Real death and utter desolation come from the desertion of the soul by God; the chastisement that he directly imposes evidences his presence and energy, and it therefore promises life.

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II. WHILE IN THE LIGHT WE SHOULD BE PREPARED FOR THE DARK PLACES. We stumble in the dark, and are terrified and confounded by it because we do not know it and are not in readiness for it. Like Adam in 'Paradise Lost,' we are surprised at the first coming on of light. Because we expect the night and know that a new day will follow, we can contemplate the deepening gloom of evening without apprehension. The miner, prepared for the darkness of his subterranean work, takes his lamp with him. Every soul should be warned that it is likely some day to be plunged into spiritual darkness. If ready with the quiet inward light of faith, it need fear nothing. While we know that God's rod and staff are with us to comfort us, we shall not be dismayed, though we shall be saddened, at being called to walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

III. SOULS LEARN LESSONS OF LIGHT IN DARK PLACES. In a deep well the stars above are visible at noon. In deep humiliation heavenly light is seen that is lost in the garish show of earthly commonplace life as well as on the heights of pride and presumption. Tears of sorrow purge the vision of the soul. It is well sometimes to be alone in the dark with God.

IV. THERE ARE DARK PLACES OF SPIRITUAL DEATH THAT ARE MORE AWFUL THAN THE ABODE OF DEPARTED SPIRITS. To the old-world view Hades was a realm of sinless gloom. But worse than the darkness of this Hades is the darkness of those who are dead in trespasses and sin. Such men carry hell within their own breasts. The blackness of death broods over their spiritual natures so that they feel no qualms of conscience, and are awake to no voices from heaven. These darkest places are never assigned by God to his creatures. If they are found in them it is because they have plunged into them of their own will.

Ver. 7.—*Hedged about.* I. EVERY LIFE IS SURROUNDED BY DIVINE LIMITATIONS. God hedges all of us about. Some have a narrow field of freedom and others a wider field. But every man's field is fenced in. Within certain limits we have scope for choice and will. Yet even there choice is fettered. For there is not only the hedge that bounds our area of action, there is the chain on our own person that hampers our movements. Free-will is far from being unlimited. Or, if the will is not fettered, the execution of it is. Note some of the things that make up the hedge which God plants about us. 1. *Physical limitations*, laws of nature, circumstances of our habitat, the measure of our bodily powers, special hindrances in external events that go contrary to us, and, with some, disease, maiming, or other bodily impediment beyond our control. 2. *Mental limitations.* There is a limit to what we can think of, imagine, or desire. Our knowledge is limited—both knowledge of ends and knowledge of means. As one who finds himself a stranger in a mountainous country is shut in on all sides because he does not know the passes, our ignorance fetters us and hinders us. 3. *Moral limitations.* God fences our way with his Law. There are forbidden fields which no material barrier shuts off, yet from which the mysterious, invisible bands of righteousness keep us back. Thus the man whose conscience is awake is often aware of being hedged in and chained down where one of duller spirituality feels free to roam at pleasure.

II. THESE DIVINE LIMITATIONS ARE FELT TO BE IRKSOME TO US WHEN OUR WILL IS IN CONFLICT WITH GOD'S WILL. All finite beings must be hedged about by their natural limits. Angels must be within the fence of their powers and rights. Pure spirits are under the law of God. But to these beings the barriers cannot be irksome. They must be submitted to with meek and happy complacency. No wistful gaze is cast beyond into forbidden pasture, no covetous greed vexes with longings for the unattainable or the unlawful. But we men on earth live in frequent conflict with our heavenly Father's will. We find the walls to be hard because we fling ourselves upon them. Our chain galls us because we chafe and fret ourselves against it. The wandering sheep is torn by the hedge, while the quiet obedient sheep knows nothing of the briars. When we rebel against God we murmur at his restraints. But, it is said, is not the bondage the same while unfelt? and is it not ignominious to be oblivious of it? and is there not something noble even in the hopeless blow that is struck for freedom? The most subtle spiritual temptation of the devil takes this form, and it tempts to the most wicked sin—rebellion against God for its own sake. And it is a delusion. For

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the highest obedience is not the restraint of our will before God's will, but the assimilation of the two. We learn to will what God wills. Then we keep within the Divine limitations, and yet they cease to be limitations to us. They never touch us because we never attempt nor wish to cross them. Here lies the secret of peace as well as of holiness. So lofty an attainment can only be reached through that oneness with Christ of which he speaks when he prays that his disciples may be one with him and the Father, as he is one with the Father (John xvii. 21).

Ver. 18.—*Strength and hope perished.* The sufferer feels as though his strength, or rather in the expressive word of the Hebrew, his "sap" were destroyed, and with it his hope also; and he attributes this desperate condition to the action of God. It is a condition of spiritual affliction the pathology of which demands careful investigation, for it is symptomatic of a great progress of inward trouble.

I. IT INDICATES THAT EXTERNAL CALAMITIES HAVE PRODUCED INTERNAL DISTRESS. Every calamity assails the soul. But for a while the citadel holds out. Without the storm beats furiously. Within there is security and comparative quiet. At length, after a certain force of trouble is attained, in the addition of wave upon wave as in Job's case, or in the access of some one overwhelming disaster as in the destruction of Jerusalem, the defence fails, the enemy enters the breach and pours in a flood over the whole fortress. Sorrow of heart follows the loss of wealth, sickness, or other trouble of outer life.

II. IT INDICATES THAT DISTRESS OF SOUL HAS UNDERMINED THE POWERS OF ENDURANCE. The "sap" perishes. For a time a man holds on bravely, though with bleeding heart. But as the grief grows upon him he "breaks down," he can stand it no more, he says he cannot bear it. In one sense he can bear any amount of trouble that does not extinguish his being. He can pass through it and come out of it alive. But to bear trouble in the sense of keeping self-possessed and calm under it may be no longer possible. Wild and reckless anguish takes the place of sober, patient grief. The strength of soul is gone. The spirit that bore up against the blast is broken. Crushed and helpless, the sufferer no longer contends with the storm, but permits himself to be tossed and dashed about at the sport of the cruel waves.

III. IT INDICATES THAT THE LOSS OF STRENGTH HAS ENDED IN DESPAIR. Hope also perishes. A broad line must be drawn between sorrow that is lightened by hope and sorrow without hope. So long as the faintest ray still glimmers on the horizon the prospect is not utterly dark. When hope goes the soul is indeed abandoned to its distresses. The most acute pain may be borne with comparative equanimity so long as there is prospect of relief. Directly that prospect is destroyed a much smaller trouble becomes unendurable. Now and again we meet with a soul that has lost hope; we see it drifting on the wild sea of life without rudder or compass, a mere wreck of its former self.

IV. IT IS AN INTERNAL CONDITION THAT SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN AS INDICATIVE OF CORRESPONDING EXTERNAL FACTS. We need not assume that there will be no bright future, for the desponding despair is not its own justification. It is often irrational, almost insane. It springs from grief that is big enough to hide all prospect of better things, but not to destroy the possibility of their ultimate arrival. The very fact that the trouble is traced to God—this trouble is "from the Eternal"—should help us to distrust the doleful prophecy of despair. If God our Father sends trouble, it is well. He will surely bring good out of it. For one who has faith in Christ no distress should be allowed to end in despair.

Vers. 19—21.—*God taking notice of man's affliction.* In his distress the sufferer cries to God, calling upon his great Helper to note his condition and remember it. Then he is calmed by prayer, and rests in the assurance that God does not forget his trouble. Recalling this thought to mind, he recovers hope.

I. THE CRY FOR GOD'S NOTICE. 1. *It is to God.* At first it seems as though God had forgotten his afflicted child. The vision of the Divine countenance is clouded; no voice speaks out of the darkness. Desolate and despairing, in misery that is bitter as wormwood and gall, the troubled soul seems to be deserted of God in the hour of greatest need. Then the sufferer cries out to God. Here is instinctive wisdom. We may or

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we may not be observed by our fellow-men, and though human sympathy is a consolation, and indifference an additional bitterness, still in the heaviest trouble man can do little. It is not his notice that we should be most anxious to attract. The clamour of the afflicted for pity is an indication of weakness. But we do need God's sympathy; this is true healing balm. To him let the cry of trouble ascend. 2. *It is for God's notice.* It is not for relief, but for remembrance by God. There is good reason to trust that the remembrance will result in the relief. Nevertheless, the first and chief necessity is that God would take notice of us in trouble. If he do so we can leave the rest to him. It would be well if our prayers implied more simple reliance on the goodness of God, without perfect definitions of what we desire him to do for us.

II. THE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S NOTICE. No sooner is the cry out of his lips than the sufferer comforts himself with the assurance that God does remember his affliction. Thus speedily is the prayer answered, even in the very act of uttering it. Nevertheless, it is not to be thought that God did not remember the affliction till he had been implored to do so. We should rather understand that it was always under the pitying eye of God, only the Divine compassionate recognition of it was not discovered until prayed for. Thus we often pray to God to do for us what he is already doing, and receive an answer to our prayers in the opening of our eyes to see the Divine action that has been hitherto unobserved. We pray that God *will* be merciful to us. He answers our prayer, not by becoming merciful, but by showing us that he is and has been merciful all along. This revelation comes to us in two ways. 1. *We are able to believe more in the character of God, in his love and mercy.* Then we can apply this faith to our present circumstances, and infer with confidence that such a God must be remembering us even when we see no proof of his notice, as a child when lost at first despairs, but, after reflecting on the love of his father and mother, comforts himself with the assurance that they will surely never desert him. 2. *We are able to see indications of God's notice.* Sometimes we can see how God is working for our deliverance when we shift our standpoint and regard our life from the footstool of prayer.

III. THE HOPE THAT SPRINGS FROM GOD'S NOTICE. This is enough. God observes us. Still the trouble is great and bitter. But we know that he will not permit us to perish. As the shipwrecked crew wave garments and make frantic efforts to attract the attention of a passing vessel, and recover hope directly they see indications that they are discovered, so troubled souls should lose all despair as soon as they learn that they are seen by God. It may still be impossible to see how God will save. But we can trust that to him. Now, that we may enjoy this hope, it is necessary for us to call to mind the fact that God is remembering our affliction. Much depends on the aspect of affairs on which we dwell. If we turn to the wormwood and gall our lot will seem to be bitter without mitigation. We must voluntarily direct our thoughts away to the unseen remembrance of God, that we may receive the comfort of hope.

Vers. 22, 23.—*The unceasing mercies of God.* It would seem, according to the best authorities, that we ought to read the first of these two verses thus: "The Lord's mercies, verily they cease not, surely his compassions fail not." Thus we are assured of the enduring character of God's mercies. How striking is this assurance, coming where it does after monstrous dirges of despair! In the Lamentations we meet with one of the richest confessions of faith in the goodness of God. The black clouds are not universal; even here there is a break, and the brightest sunlight streams through, all the more cheering for the darkness that precedes it. This is a remarkable testimony to the breadth and force of Divine grace. No scene is so terrible as absolutely to exclude all vision of it. Its penetrating rays find their way through chinks and crannies of the deepest dungeon. Were our eyes but open to see it, every one of us would have to confess to indications of its presence. Surely it is a great consolation for the desponding that even the exceptional sufferer of the Lamentations sees the unceasing mercies of God!

I. GOD'S MERCIES NEVER CEASE. 1. *We have no claim upon their continuance.* Mercies are to the undeserving. It is much that such as we receive any. We could have no right to complain if they all ceased. The least of them is beyond our merit. 2. *We have done much to provoke the cessation of them.* (1) By ungratefully accepting them; (2) by complainingly ignoring them; (3) by sinfully abusing them. 3. *They*

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sometimes appear to cease. They are not always equally visible. But as the moon which seems to wax and wane never changes in itself, the grace which appears to us to fluctuate, and even at times to be extinguished, is never lessened, much less is it destroyed. 4. *They change their form.* The morning light varies from the evening light. Yet both come from the same sun. God's mercy is sometimes cheery, at other times it seems to frown upon us. But the wrath is mercy in disguise; and not only so, but under the circumstances that make it necessary it is more merciful than gentleness would be. There may be more mercy in the surgeon's knife than in the bed of down.

II. GOD'S MERCIES ARE CONSTANTLY RENEWED. The same mercies will not last for ever. They are gifts and acts for a definite time. What suits one age does not agree with another. God adapts his grace to the immediate needs of the hour. His mercies are not statuesque and immobile. They are living and suitable to need. They are never anachronous. They are never stale. God gives to each of us new mercies. He is living and acting in our midst every day and at each immediate moment. We read of God's mercies in writings of David and St. John. But we have not to exhume the antique mercies that were bestowed on these men of the olden times. Our own mercies are fresh to-day. As God keeps the old world green by renewing it every spring, so he refreshes and invigorates his people by spring-times of grace. Moreover, it is well to see how he does this daily, and to wake in the morning with a joyous thankfulness in prospect of the entirely new mercies of the new day.

III. THE CEASELESSNESS OF GOD'S MERCY IS A PROOF OF HIS FAITHFULNESS. 1. *It is the fulfilment of his promise that he will never leave nor forsake his people.* 2. *It is also a sign that he is still acting according to his ancient word.* For the mercy, being not only continued, but also renewed, shows us that God is fulfilling his promise in the immediate present. The friend who builds us a house may be considered to be faithful to his promise to shelter us as long as the house stands. But he who promises daily bread gives an additional proof of faithfulness by visiting us every day. The manna showed that God was daily present to fulfil his purposes of grace. Daily mercies are recurrent reminders of the faithfulness of God.

Ver. 24.—*The secret of hope.* The reader of the psalms is familiar with the utterance, "The Lord is my Portion." The characteristic peculiarity of the adoption of this confession of faith by the sufferer of the Lamentations is his taking it as a ground of hope. The present is so dark that he can have little joy even in God. Earthly things are so unpropitious that he can hope little from them. But with God for his Portion he can look forward from the troubles of the present and the threatenings of earthly calamities to an unearthly joy in the future. Let us endeavour to see how to have God for our Portion is the secret of hope.

I. GOD IS THE BEST OBJECT OF HOPE. 1. *Consider how God can be an Object of hope.* We hope in God when we hope to enjoy his presence, to bask in the sunshine of his love, to enter into the life of communion with him. To know God is satisfaction to the intellect. To have fellowship with God through love is to have rest and joy in the heart. To be reconciled to God is to have the trouble of conscience allayed. All the deepest longings of the soul find their end and satisfaction in God. 2. *Consider how God is the one perfect Object of hope.* The greatest disappointment of an earthly hope is when the thing anticipated is given to us and yet the joy expected from it is not forthcoming. We clasp our treasure and find it to be dross, or we see it to be gold and we find that it will not stay the hunger of our souls. We are larger than the biggest earthly hope. Our aspirations soar above the highest of them. But God is higher and deeper and greater than the largest desire of any soul. He is just what we all need for rest and gladness. He cannot disappoint us. If money is our portion it may be lost, or it may not buy ease of heart. If power, pleasure, success, or any other common end be our portion, we may be most wearied when we have gained most. God is the Portion to satisfy hope, and he only.

II. GOD IS THE BEST GROUND OF HOPE. We have most assurance that our hope will not fail us when we trust in him. Why? 1. Because he is *good.* Malignant beings take pleasure in frustrating hope; cruel people do it with indifference; and selfish and thoughtless men unwittingly. But God, who is love itself and who ever regards the

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needs of his children with merciful consideration, is too gracious to disappoint the hope we have in him. 2. Because he is *faithful*. He has invited our confidence and promised his inheritance to his obedient and trustful children. Thus he has pledged his word. His honour is involved. He will never prove false to his promise. 3. Because he is *almighty*. With the best intentions a man may be compelled to disappoint the confidence reposed upon him through simple inability to meet it. The bankrupt cannot pay his debts, however honest he may be. But as there is no limit to the power of God, so there will be no failure of hope in him. 4. Because hope in God is *lawful and right*. We need not fear that the strictest judgment will condemn it. It is a holy hope, and it is therefore likely more and more to be satisfied, as the judgment of God condemns and destroys unworthy objects of ambition.

Vers. 25, 26.—*Quiet waiting*. We are here first reminded that God does not disregard those who seek him. Though his grace may be delayed, it will come in due time. Then we are told that this waiting for God's response to our prayers is for our good, provided it be patient.

I. GOD VISITS WITH GRACE THOSE WHO SEEK HIM, THOUGH THEY MAY HAVE TO WAIT FOR HIM. 1. *He expects to be sought after*. To wait for God implies attention and watchfulness. But direct effort to find grace in God is involved in seeking him. There are who say that this is a sign of distrust; that we should wait without seeking God; that to go after him implies impatience at his tarrying; and, in short, that all prayer which is positive petition, shows self-will, impatience, and distrust. But this hypercritical view of prayer is a delusion. For the act of seeking may develop a trustfulness and bring about a preparedness which would not be found without it. We have the invitation of Christ to "seek that we may find." 2. *He may delay his response to our appeal*. He may make us wait. The reason for this cannot be any reluctance or indifference on God's part. But it may be that the time is not ripe for our receiving the response, or that we shall be disciplined into preparedness by waiting, or that, other interests beyond our own being concerned, the answer must tarry on account of them. Be the reason what it may, we must be warned to expect this delay, or we shall be grievously disappointed, perplexed, and even thrown into doubt and dospondency. 3. *He will surely respond in due time*. God is good to all who truly wait for and seek him. He is not a capricious, partial, respecter of persons. Nor does he require a certain amount of merit in the petitioner. Our want is our sole claim, and the most unworthy are the most needy. But observe: (1) we must truly seek God himself, and not merely pleasant things from God; and (2) though God is good to all who thus seek him, his goodness does not take the same form to each. To some it is healing balm, to others purging hyssop.

II. WAITING FOR GOD'S GRACE IS GOOD FOR THOSE WHO SEEK HIM, PROVIDED THAT THEY WAIT QUIETLY. 1. *God permits them to wait for their own profit*. Whatever other ends may be served by the delay, the good of the petitioner is aimed at in the providential arrangement. How? (1) By testing *faith*. Thus it is seen whether faith be real, enduring, and constant. (2) By requiring *submission*. One of the most essential conditions of profiting by Divine grace is willingness to submit to the will of God. (3) By exercising our own *spiritual powers*. If the timid swimmer were succoured the moment he cried for help, he would never gain confidence and strength. (4) By affording us opportunity for *consideration*. While we wait we can think. We may then measure our need and see what will supply it. Looking at the approaching salvation in the light of hope and imagination, we are better prepared to enjoy it. 2. *In order that this waiting may be profitable it must be quiet*. Impatience wrecks faith and submissiveness and obedience, and all the graces that are necessary for a right reception of Divine salvation. It is difficult to be quiet while waiting. We grow restless and fret ourselves as the weary hours drag past. It is harder to wait than to work, because work occupies us as waiting does not. Yet we lose much for lack of patience. We are not quiet enough to hear the still small voice that would bring salvation. In our patience we must possess our souls if we are to receive into them the richest gifts of the goodness of God.

Ver. 27.—*Youth*. I. THE YOKE BELONGS TO YOUTH. It is common to hear youth

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spoken of as a time of pleasure. Older people do their best to damp the joyousness of the young by telling them that these are their happy days, soon will come the dark days of trouble, let them enjoy the bright time while it lasts. Even if such a view of life were correct, the wisdom of thrusting it forward is not easy to discover. Why spoil the feast by pointing to the sword of Damocles? Why direct the walk on a fair spring day to the graveyard? Surely it were wiser to say, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." But this view is false. It arises from the disturbed imagination of later years. Grown morose with care, men look back on the earlier days of their life and imagine them to have been far brighter than those they now enjoy; but they only do so by that common trick of memory that selects the pleasant pictures and drops the unpleasant ones. 1. Youth is a time of *restraint*. With all their lightness of heart, children feel the bonds of authority and long for the time when they shall be their own masters. It is difficult for grown men who have the free command of their own actions to understand the irksomeness of the necessary bonds of childhood. Restrained in the nursery and in the schoolroom under law and supervision, liable to ignominious rebuke, many children feel themselves in slavery. Wiser treatment gives more liberty; but still it necessarily continues many restraints. And in full-grown life, when the bondage is more galling, young men commonly have to obey and submit to direction more than older men. 2. Youth is a time of *toil*. Men generally have to work hard in their younger years. The hours of labour are longest; the tasks imposed are the most disagreeable; the wages paid are the lowest. Most men as they advance in years work for shorter hours at more agreeable tasks and for greater rewards.

II. THE YOKE IS GOOD FOR YOUTH. We have seen that it is incorrect to regard youth as a time of exceptional pleasantness. For a normal life the day brightens as it lengthens, at least till the meridian is attained, and even later the soft light of evening is to many a source of deep, calm joy unknown in the feverish excitement of youth (see Wordsworth's poem on the superiority of the quiet September songs of the birds to their wild, restless spring songs). Nevertheless, the very yoke of youth is good. 1. If it must be borne at all, *the yoke can be best borne in youth*. The mind is then most supple to shape itself to the unwonted burden and pressure of it. Then a man can yield to authority with most pliancy and face hard labour most confidently. 2. *The yoke is necessary for youth*. It is a good thing to bear it in youth. (1) *Restraint* is then necessary. Liberty would be abused. Until an independent conscience has been developed, instructed, and strengthened, the external conscience of authority is needed. (2) *Work* is also good for youth. Even the discipline of unpleasant tasks is wholesome. It conquers self-will and the idle love of pleasure, and trains in self-denial. 3. *Later years are benefited by the yoke of youth*. Even if the years during which it is borne are not so happy as they might be, the man himself is better in the whole of his life. He profits by the discipline. He learns habits of self-restraint and industry. He is able better to appreciate the privileges of advancing stages of life.

Vers. 31—33.—*Chastisement only for a season.* I. THE FACT THAT CHASTISEMENT IS ONLY FOR A SEASON. God does "cast off" and "cause grief." His love does not nullify his wrath. When grieved and disowned by God the soul feels utterly desolate. But the terrible judgment is only for a season. It will end in reconciliation and compassion. This great truth gives an entirely new complexion to our views of life and providence. We see at times the severe side. But we misjudge if we take that as a sample of the whole. Indeed the very severity prepares the way for mercy; for God can show compassion after chastisement to a degree that would not be good before the wholesome discipline. The sunshine, which would wither the plants before the storm, coming after it helps them to grow and flourish on the water it has brought to their roots. 1. *This fact is no ground for reckless indifference*. For (1) the wrath is terrible enough while it lasts; (2) it must endure as long as impenitent guilt is persisted in; and (3) sin that presumes on mercy is the most gross and culpable ingratitude. 2. *This fact should be a consolation in trouble*. Hope may buoy up the sufferer. And resort may be had to prayer. It seems as though the soul were abandoned. But if God has not cast it off for ever, he must still feel interest in it, and may therefore be appealed to for mercy. 3. *This fact is an encouragement to repentance*. Endless punishment discourages repentance. It acts in the opposite way from that of all useful punishment.

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It tends to confirm sin. It is the prospect of mercy that softens the heart and prompts feelings of penitence.

II. THE REASON WHY CHASTISEMENT IS ONLY FOR A SEASON. This reason is to be found in the character of God. "He doth not afflict willingly," or rather, "from his heart." There is an essential difference between chastisement and mercy. Chastisement is necessary and sent reluctantly, but mercy springs from the heart of God and is given willingly. That is a false and libellous representation of God, according to which the theologian describes the outpouring of Divine wrath as though there were a real satisfaction to God in the process of causing pain to his creatures. The description of everlasting perdition as given to lost souls with a flood of wrath is more like the action of a malignant demon than that of a merciful God. It is sometimes so spoken of as though every attribute in God but mercy were eternal. Truth, justice, holiness, wrath, vengeance, are to endure for ever. Only mercy has its day. Only this one grace is short-lived and soon to be exhausted. The calumny is a direct contradiction to Scripture, which teaches over and over again that the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever. This attribute at least is eternal. This one springs most directly from the heart of God; for it is the fruit of love. While we say God is angry at times, we do not say God is anger, because anger is not of the essential nature of God. But we do say, not only God loves, but God is love. But it may be said, if God does not afflict "from his heart," why does he afflict at all? It must be because the circumstances of his children make it necessary. He does it not for his own sake. Then he must do it for their sakes. Seeing, however, that the chastisement is not agreeable to them, there must be some object in it, some result of it by which they are to profit. It must, therefore, cease in due time, that it may give place to that happy result.

Ver. 38.—*How evil and good both proceed from God.* The Hebrew prophets show no inclination towards Persian dualism. They never attempt to solve the mystery of evil by the doctrine of two principles in nature, a good and an evil principle, in any respect co-ordinate one with another. On the contrary, they emphasize the monism of their creed by ascribing sole supremacy and originating power to "the Eternal." Nevertheless, they do not teach that moral evil is caused by God. This they regard as springing from the heart of man. In the verse before us we have no question of this darkest kind of evil. It is not sin, but suffering, that is referred to, as the context clearly shows. We have just been told that God will not cast off for ever because he does not afflict from his heart. We are now reminded that it is not the less true that God sends adverse as well as pleasant things.

I. THE WHOLE OF OUR LIFE-EXPERIENCE IS UNDER THE DIRECTION OF GOD. Our conduct is in our own hands; but what is not thus immediately dependent on our own will is directed by God. Other men influence us, but they are overruled by the Most High. Chance and accident seem to strike us, but chance and accident only exist to our ignorance. They are not really, for Providence excludes them. We sometimes speak of visitations of God, as though he came and went. But that only means that we perceive his action at one time more than at another. God is ever working in us. "In him we live, and move, and have our being." Things great and small, pleasant and painful, spiritual and physical, eternal and temporal, are under the hand of God and regulated by his will.

II. GOD TREATS US IN VARIOUS WAYS. He sends both evil and good. He has not one unchanging method of action. He varies his treatment according to requirement. To one he sends more evil, to another more good. Yet to none does he send experience of one kind only. The hard lot has many mitigations. The pleasant places have their shadows. As we pass through life we see how God deals with us in wise suitableness, now sending most good, now most evil.

III. WE MUST NOT INFER THAT IF GOD IS WITH US NO TROUBLE CAN BEFALL. If evil as well as good proceeds from the mouth of the Most High, no assurance of the presence of the Author of both will justify us in disbelieving in the coming of either experience. We must be on our guard or we shall be disappointed. We must be prepared to expect evil things even while we are under the care of God.

IV. WE MUST NOT INFER THAT IF EVIL BEFALL US GOD CANNOT BE WITH US. This inference of unbelief is the natural consequence of disappointment in the presumption

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that, if God is with us, we cannot suffer trouble. There is real comfort in the thought that evil is sent by God, if only by the removal of the common assumption that it indicates desertion by him.

V. WE MAY INFER THAT IF EVIL PROCEEDS FROM GOD IT IS PERMITTED FOR THE SAKE OF ULTIMATE GOOD. For God does not delight in sending evil. His heart is not in it. But his heart is in mercy. He may seem to send the two indifferently; but he does not bestow them with equal pleasure nor with similar results, for the good is sent for its own sake, and the evil only that it may lead to higher good in the future.

Ver. 40.—*Self-examination.* It is interesting to watch the progress of the thoughts and feelings of the writer who addresses us as a sufferer in the overthrow of Jerusalem. At first he bewails his lot, then he calls to God for assistance. After doing so he regains faith, and calls to mind the merciful kindness of God. This helps him to the assurance that the trouble is but temporary. He feels that since it comes from God it must not be complained of. It is rather a call to reflection and self-examination.

I. CHASTISEMENT SHOULD LEAD TO SELF-EXAMINATION. It does us little good until it makes us thoughtful. We must sit still under it and think. Then we should turn our thoughts in upon ourselves. We are inclined to look anywhere else, to discuss the justice of God, to complain of the conduct of men, to criticize the course of events. But the one thing necessary is to look within. This is difficult, as any one who has honestly tried it knows quite well. It is not necessary habitually. Too much introspection develops a morbid subjectivity. But there are special occasions for self-examination, and trouble is one of them.

II. SELF-EXAMINATION SHOULD INVESTIGATE CONDUCT. It is "our ways" that we are to inquire into. 1. The important question is as to *what we do and how we live.* People examine their feelings. The examination is delusive and unwholesome. They examine their opinions. But opinions should not be matters of moral trial so much as questions for calm intellectual testing. The chief point is as to our behaviour. 2. The most important questions of conduct are those which concern our *habitual actions.* "Our ways" are not isolated deeds, but courses of action. We may be surprised into a fall or spurred into a good deed. More significant is our normal, everyday conduct. This is what we should investigate most closely.

III. THE INVESTIGATON OF CONDUCT SHOULD BE SEARCHING AND JUDICIAL. 1. It should be *searching.* Evil is subtle. Plausible excuses cover bad deeds. We must not be content with condemning conscious and confessed wickedness. The hidden evil of our heart must be searched out. The detective must do his part before the magistrate does his. 2. It should be *periodical.* We must "try" our ways. It is unprofitable and demoralizing to conscience to confess guilt which we do not feel and see. Until we are convinced of it we are dishonest in attempting to blame ourselves for it. Conviction must precede the sentence. We should also be just to ourselves. Wholesale self-accusation is often dishonest and rarely profitable. We want point and specific charges in our judgment of ourselves—the Law of God, the voice of conscience, the example of Christian standards by which to try ourselves. If we find the process difficult, we may pray that God will carry it on for us (Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24).

IV. THE CONVICTION WHICH FOLLOWS THE TRIAL OF OUR OWN CONDUCT SHOULD LEAD US TO REPENTANCE. It is of no use unless it does this. The mere sense of guilt is depressing and, left to itself, may lead us to ruin through despair. Repentance should follow. We are to know that we are in the wrong way only in order that we may turn from it to the right way. We all sin, and therefore self-examination should lead all of us through conviction of sin to repentance. Then we can return to God. He waits only for our confession of guilt. When we own to it he will pardon it.

Ver. 44.—*God covering himself with a cloud.* There are dark hours when God not only seems to be hidden from view, but to be so wrapped in thick clouds that even our prayers cannot penetrate to him. Let us consider when and how far this is really the case.

I. SOMETIMES IT IS ONLY APPARENT. We lose heart and confidence. Discouraged and saddened, we cease to believe that God is listening to our cry. We can never see God nor hear any audible response to our cry and must always pray in faith;

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and therefore when faith fails we are ready to say that God does not hear us. We should remember that God's attention is not confined to the evidences of it that he may afford to us. He may hear us without telling us that he does, or he may simply delay the response for good and wise reasons. Let us, therefore, beware of the folly of judging of God's actions by our own passing moods.

II. SOMETIMES IT IS REAL, BUT MERCIFUL. God does not always accept our prayers even when he is regarding us favourably. 1. He may be *trying our faith*. It may be better for us that our faith should be tested and strengthened than that we should have the particular thing we desire. 2. We may be asking *unwisely*. Perhaps the greatest unkindness would be to answer our foolish prayer according to our wish. The mother must turn a deaf ear to the cry of her child for a poisonous fruit. It is hard thus to refuse. Nothing tries love more severely. It is a proof of the great love of God that he is firm in thus apparently treating us with indifference when all the while his heart yearns to comfort us.

III. SOMETIMES IT IS BOTH REAL AND WRATHFUL. God will not always hearken to prayer. There are circumstances that raise great banks of clouds between our souls and Heaven such as the most vehement petition cannot pierce. 1. *Unrepented sin*. If we have sinned ever so heavily and confess our iniquity, heaven is open to hear the faintest sigh of penitence. But against impenitence it is firm as brass. 2. *Self-will*. So long as we are praying, rebelliously demanding our own way and not submitting to God's will, no prayer of ours can reach his throne in heaven. We may dare to lay our wish before God in humility, but yet in frank expression of it. Nevertheless, it can only be entertained by God when we add in spirit, if not in words, "Not my will, but thine, be done." Thus may we cry to the void and have back only the mocking echo of our foolish prayer. We may send urgent requests towards heaven, and they will only lose themselves in the thick, black clouds of Divine disfavour which come between us and God. It is hopeful, however, for a soul to know this. When we see the cloud we are half-way towards the removal of it.

IV. IT IS THE WORK OF CHRIST TO DISSIPATE THE CLOUD THAT SHUTS OUR PRAYER OUT FROM GOD. 1. He permits us to pray *in his Name*, with his authority, and pleading his merit. 2. He teaches us to pray *in the right spirit* of penitence, submission, and faith.

Vers. 49, 50.—*Tears which only God can wipe away.* I. THERE ARE TEARS WHICH ONLY GOD CAN WIPE AWAY. Jerusalem is so desolate that one who mourns her sad estate weeps such tears. But in all ages there have been sufferers in similar grief. 1. When sorrow is *acute*. The lighter troubles may be patiently endured, or resisted, or mitigated, or driven away by sympathy and brotherly aid. There are troubles which no man can touch, sores which no balm of Gilead can ease, a secret bitterness known only to the heart of the sufferer. In such agonies of distress comfort is a mockery, to attempt to console is only to intrude into the sanctuary of sorrow and to harrow the wounds we cannot heal. 2. When sorrow is *chronic*. The sudden flood of tears may be quickly stanched. There are people of mercurial temperament who seem to be in the depths of despair one moment and elated with pleasure the next. It is not difficult to stay the tears of these shallow natures. But when the tears flow on through the bright day as in the long night, this weeping without intermission passes the bounds of human aid. The broken heart, the ruined life, hopes shattered, and joys buried in the grave, open a fountain of grief that only God can stay. Now, it is important to recognize this fact. If we are only driven to see it by hard experience, we may lose ourselves in despair before we can find any consolation in God. It is well to know when we are in smooth water that storms are coming which our vessel cannot weather. Then we may be prepared to look for a haven.

II. THERE ARE NO TEARS WHICH GOD CANNOT WIPE AWAY. The sufferer weeps "till the Lord look down, and behold from heaven." But when God looks the tears will be dried. Relief comes from God. It comes in a look from God. It comes when heaven is open to the troubled soul. One look from heaven is enough. How is this? 1. When God looks from heaven *he manifests himself*. He is always regarding us. But at times it seems to us that we are forgotten and deserted by him. Then again we see that he is observing us. The newly manifested nearness of God is a consolation.

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2. When God looks *he shows compassion.* We express compassion by the eye more than by the voice. The look of pity is its surest, gentlest, most touching expression. This is the look of God when he beholds distress. 3. When God looks at the sufferer *he sends help to him.* God is not one who can contemplate suffering and then "pass by on the other side." With him to see want is to aid it. It is therefore enough that God regards us. The rest must follow. 4. When God looks from heaven *he draws the sufferer up to himself.* He attracts by his wonderful look of loving-kindness. The revelation of heaven lifts the troubled spirit up to heaven. By communion with heaven earthly tears are wiped away.

Ver. 57.—"*Fear not!*" The recollection of how God has forbidden one not to fear in the past is a plea in praying that he will remove the ground of fear in the present.

I. WE MUCH NEED DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENTS TO OVERCOME FEAR. 1. *In real danger.* It is not only the coward who fears. Indifference often gets the credit of courage. Many fear not simply because they are blind. To see would be to tremble. For the great powers of the universe, "the terror by night and the arrow that flieth by day," and the spiritual temptations that threaten our souls, are too strong for us. 2. *In the threatening aspect of the future.* Heavy clouds will gather to windward. Storms are plainly brewing out at sea. Whether they will burst over our heads or not we cannot say. But the very uncertainty adds to the terror; for fear feeds on vague alarms and may be conquered when the worst is known. 3. *In the mystery of life.* Even when we see no threatening danger the awful unknown is peopled to our imagination with strange horrors. 4. *In the fears of others.* Nothing is so contagious as fear. Hence the madness of panics. It is hard to be brave among the timorous. 5. *In hours of weakness.* When we are weary courage flags. We can be brave at noon, but midnight awakens fear. Guilt is full of alarm.

II. WE HAVE MANY DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENTS TO OVERCOME FEAR. 1. *In directly urging us not to fear.* He has said, "Fear not!" He will not mock with empty words. 2. *In promises of help.* The Scriptures teem with words of grace for troubled souls, as when they are bidden to cast their burden upon God because he will sustain them, to call upon him in the day of trouble and he will hear them, etc. By the veracity and honour of God we have enough assurance in any one of these promises to dispel fear. 3. *In the fatherly character of God.* If we had no instruction not to fear and no promise of help, we might still know enough of God to rest confident that all must be well when we are in his hands. The child fears nothing when nestling on its mother's bosom. Who shall fear that leans upon the bosom of God? 4. *In our personal relations with God.* Let it be noted that everybody under all circumstances is not to be urged to cast fears to the wind. The guilty should fear. The impenitent have no excuse for abandoning fear. They who are at enmity with God should dwell in great trembling. It is when reconciled through Christ, forgiven and restored to our home, that as redeemed souls we can shake off fear.

III. DIVINE ASSURANCES AGAINST FEAR SHOULD INSPIRE OUR PRAYERS FOR HELP IN DANGER. We are to remember how God has bidden us not to fear. Here is a grand source of confidence when we cry for help. For it is the very Word of God that has led us to stand facing the storm. His action must be true to his Word. Nevertheless, we do need to pray for help in danger. God's promises are conditional. When he dissuades us from fear it is on the understanding that we seek refuge beneath the covert of his wings. To the storm-tossed soul he says, "Fear not!" but he expects that soul to welcome him as its Pilot. Then the storm will be weathered. God's assurance of safety is for those who turn to his protection. It is those who are "in Christ Jesus" for whom there is no condemnation, and who therefore need fear nothing.

Vers. 59—66.—*The great appeal.* We can see the advantage to justice of appealing from a lower to a higher court. Sometimes the process has to be repeated and the case tried again and again until the best attainable verdict is got from the very highest tribunal. In the East, where justice was commonly neglected by indolence, outraged by violence, or prostituted by bribery, men felt strongly the value of an appeal. To the believer in the supreme Judge it was a great satisfaction that he could turn from the corrupt and venal courts of human judicature to the high court of Heaven. It may

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often be a relief to make this appeal. For absolute justice between man and man is rarely obtained. Three things are wanted to make the result satisfactory—clear evidence, a just verdict, and a firm execution of the sentence.

I. CLEAR EVIDENCE. It is difficult to make one's condition rightly apprehended by men. Frequently there are facts that cannot be explained, or the whole transaction stands on a different ground from what people imagine, or its features are warped by the atmosphere of prejudice through which it is regarded. But God sees clearly and knows all. "Thou God seest me" is the comforting reflection of the vexed soul. "Thou hast seen my wrong," "Thou hast seen all," is the first consolation. But for this assurance to give comfort it is necessary that our cause should be just. God sees truly both the merit and the fault. It is useless to appeal to God with a bad case. There is no deceiving him. Let us see that our cause is always one which we can refer to the thorough investigation of the all-seeing God.

II. A JUST VERDICT. The evidence may be clear, yet the decision may be unjust if the judge is partial or corrupt. It is the comfort of one who makes the highest appeal that God not only knows all, but will decide righteously. "Judge thou my cause," says the troubled soul. God will judge all causes at the great tribunal of the judgment-day. Injustice can only live till then. Should not the oppressed bear his brief wrongs with calmness when he knows that they will soon be righted? It is interesting to see that "the day of the Eternal," which the Jews anticipated as the great judgment-day, was not regarded by them with terror, as it is often regarded by Christians. This fact may be, perhaps, partially due to a duller sense of personal sin. But surely it is chiefly owing to the grand Hebrew love of righteousness. We see strange mysteries of inequality and injustice that are at times perfectly bewildering. The judgment of Heaven will set all right. And even now God may do much for his children by his providence.

III. A FIRM EXECUTION. The sufferer prays that God will "render unto them a recompense." A Christian spirit should deliver us from the thirst for vengeance that was too pronounced even in the most devout Hebrew. But we must beware of a weak quasi-humanitarianism that would sacrifice justice and wholesome retribution to a one-sided gentleness. 1. It is necessary that justice should be done in action as well as that a just sentence should be pronounced in word. 2. It is for the good of all concerned—the victim, the public, and even the wrong-doer, that guilt should be chastised. 3. It is well to transfer vengeful feelings which we cannot utterly destroy into a passive resignation of our case to God. We are not to avenge ourselves, if only because God has said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*Afflicted by God.* Every child of God, nay, every son of man, has endured affliction. Jeremiah and the city which he here personifies and represents may be said to have experienced affliction in an extraordinary degree. A fact so universal cannot be without special significance in human life. But not all the afflicted discern this underlying and profitable meaning.

I. AFFLICTION LEADS SOME TO DOUBT THE EXISTENCE OF GOD. It is not uncommon for people to say in their hearts, what some even venture to say with their lips, "If there were a God, I should not be suffered to pass through misfortunes and sorrows so distressing and so undeserved."

II. AFFLICTION LEADS SOME TO DOUBT GOD'S BENEVOLENCE AND KINDLY INTEREST IN HUMAN BEINGS. Not denying the existence of Deity, these afflicted ones question his moral attributes. They ask, "If God were a Being of boundless benevolence, would he suffer us to go through waters so deep, flames so fierce? His kindness and compassion—were such attributes part of his nature—would interpose on our behalf and deliver us."

III. SOME WHO BELIEVE THAT GOD PERMITS AFFLICTION MISINTERPRET IT AS A SIGN OF HIS WRATH. This it may be; this it *was* in the case of Jerusalem. Yet God in the midst of wrath remembers mercy; he doth not keep his anger for ever. And there are instances in which no greater misinterpretation could be possible than the

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view that suffering is mere penalty, that those who suffer most are necessarily sinners above all their neighbours.

IV. AFFLICTION SHOULD BE REGARDED BY THE PIOUS AND SUBMISSIVE AS A PROOF OF DIVINE MERCY AND AS MEANT FOR THEIR GOOD. Scripture represents suffering as the chastening of a Father's hand. The experience of many a Christian is summed up in the language of the psalmist: "It was good for me that I was afflicted."

V. AFFLICTION MAY THUS BECOME, IN THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PIOUS, THE OCCASION FOR DEVOUT THANKSGIVING. How often have mature and holy Christians been heard to say, "I would not, upon looking back, have been without the ruggedness of the road, the bitterness of the cup"!—T.

Vers. 7—9.—*The way of life hedged and built up.* The man who enjoys prosperity seems also to enjoy liberty; his way lies straight and level and open before him. But it often happens in human life that liberty is changed into restraint, that every path that is smooth and peaceful is closed, that, in the figurative language of this passage, a hedge is planted, a fence is staked out, a wall is built across the traveller's way.

I. MAN'S DELIGHT IS NATURALLY IN LIBERTY AND PROSPERITY.

II. PROVIDENTIAL CIRCUMSTANCES SOMETIMES COMPLETELY DEPRIVE HIM OF SUCH LIBERTY AND PROSPERITY. 1. One may miss the object of his heart's earthly desire. He may have set his affection upon some object, he may have directed his aspiration towards some aim, he may have purposed some course in life; and all these expectations and hopes may come to nothing; circumstances may conspire against the fulfilment of such desires and intentions. 2. Another may find great delight in the service of God; and suddenly health may fail and such service may consequently be forbidden, or powers of mind may be enfeebled, or means may be reduced, or fellow-labourers, apparently necessary, may be removed by death.

III. THERE IS DANGER LEST IN SUCH A POSITION EVEN GOOD PEOPLE SHOULD BECOME IMPATIENT AND REBELLIOUS. Believing that the Almighty has power to remove every obstacle, and to make plain the roughest path, they are tempted to question the interest, the care, the benevolence of the Supreme, and to give way to fretfulness and murmuring, and to ask "Why should not God make light my heavy chain, pluck up the cruel hedge, break down the impenetrable wall?"

IV. YET IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES THE PATH WHICH GOD HAS APPOINTED SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED AS THE RIGHT PATH. Resignation to his will, waiting for his time of deliverance, confidence in his goodness,—such is the attitude of heart in which true consolation and ultimate prosperity will be found.—T.

Ver. 8.—*Unheard prayer.* There were seasons when it seemed to the prophet that God not only refused to interpose in his behalf, but refused even to listen to his prayer. In such faithless and yet not unnatural imaginations and fears many truly pious natures have participated. Complaints are made by the afflicted that they have prayed, but have prayed in vain; that God has "shut out" their prayer.

I. THERE IS PRAYER WHICH GOD DOES SHUT OUT, *i.e.* THE PRAYER OF SELFISHNESS AND SIN. Men ask and receive not, because they ask amiss. They ask for gifts which God has never promised to bestow and which he has never encouraged them unreservedly to desire. There are bad things which men ask God for and which it would harm the suppliants to receive. There are things not bad in themselves, the bestowal of which, however, upon certain persons and in certain circumstances would be spiritually harmful. Such gifts are withheld, not in malevolence, but in mercy.

II. THERE IS PRAYER WHICH IS NOT UNHEARD, BUT THE ANSWER TO WHICH IS NOT IMMEDIATE AND IS NOT JUST WHAT IS EXPECTED. Denial is one thing, delay is another. Perhaps it may be said that every true prayer is both heard and answered. For every acceptable petition takes the tone of our Saviour's ever-memorable and incomparable prayer, "Not my will, O my Father, but thine, be done." Misinterpretation is to be avoided. The reason of delay, of seeming denial, is to be sought in ourselves. God often withholds for a season, in order to awaken our faith and submission, what he intends eventually to confer.—T.

Ver. 17.—*Prosperity forgotten.* What a touching picture of extreme adversity and

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distress do these words present: "I forgat prosperity"! Days of happiness are so distant that they have faded into oblivion; their memory is obliterated by recurring sorrows, by continuous misfortunes.

I. ADVERSITY DOES NOT FULFIL ITS INTENDED PURPOSE IF IT LEADS TO DESPAIR. There are natures in which a reverse of circumstances induces depression, which gradually deepens into despondency. Where this is the case there is ground for fearing that the affections and desires have been too much centred upon things earthly and perishable, that the gifts of a kind Providence have been regarded as possessions to which those who enjoy them have a right, that the higher purposes of this earthly discipline called life have been neglected.

II. ADVERSITY SHOULD BE REGARDED BY THE CHRISTIAN AS TEMPORARY, AND AS AN APPOINTMENT OF DIVINE WISDOM AND LOVE. To forget prosperity in the past is to forget that, for the devout, obedient, and submissive, there is prosperity in reserve in the future. The cloud comes over the sky, but the sunshine of the morning will be followed in due time by the brightness which shall close in glorious sunset. The disciple of Christ cannot lose sight of the fact that his Master was "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," and that he assured his followers that "in the world they should have tribulation." But the voice that foretold conflict promised victory. To the faithful favour shall be restored and prosperity shall be renewed. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."—T.

Vers. 19, 20.—*Remembering affliction.* As the prophet entreats the Lord to remember the afflictions he and his countrymen have passed through, he records his own vivid recollection of bygone misery and humiliation. Now, the counsel of the world would be—Forget your troubles; they are past; why allow them to disturb and to distress the mind? There are, however, good reasons why this advice should be rejected, why the afflictions we have passed through should sometimes be recalled to mind.

I. THIS EXERCISE SERVES TO REMIND US OF THE UNCERTAINTY AND VICISSITUDES OF THIS LIFE. It is well that in days of prosperity men should not forget how soon the sky may be clouded, that in times of health liability to sickness and disease should be borne in mind, that the living and the active should hear a voice gently counselling them *Memento mori!*

II. THIS EXERCISE SERVES TO PRESERVE US FROM A DISPOSITION TOWARDS WORLDLINESS. In prosperity it is very common for men to cling to this world, to over-estimate its wealth, its pleasures, its honours. Let them remember days of adversity; let them consider how possible it is that such days may recur; and thus preserve themselves from the threatened sin of worldly mindedness.

III. THIS EXERCISE MAY LEAD US TO GLORIFY THE DIVINE DELIVERER. Affliction is to many a thing of the past; they have left the tempestuous seas and are in the quiet haven. Let such consider by whose great mercy such deliverance has been effected, to whom their gratitude is due. Who interposed upon their behalf and brought them into safety? Do they forget to sing, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and delivered him out of all his troubles"?

IV. THIS EXERCISE MAY SUGGEST THE EXPECTATION OF HEAVEN, AND MAY LEND ATTRACTIVENESS TO THE PROSPECT. The past naturally suggests the future. In remembering the afflictions of earth we are reminded of that state where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."—T.

Ver. 21.—*Hope reviving.* At length the unmitigated anguish and desolation expressed in the previous parts of this book seem relieved. A ray of light breaks through the dense mass of clouds. Despondency gives place to hope.

I. FROM WHAT STATE THIS LANGUAGE BETOKENS A REVULSION, A REACTION. Jeremiah has, not unnaturally, been plunged into distress, dismay, despondency. The terrible calamities which have befallen his nation are sufficient to account for this. Yet, as a child of God and a believer in Divine providence, he could not remain in desolation, he could not abandon himself to despair.

II. THE ORIGIN OF HOPE. How was the prophet lifted out of the discouragement and despondency into which he had fallen? It seems that here, as so often, hope

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sprang out of humility. When his heart was bowed and humbled within him, then he began to lift up his eyes unto the hills from whence alone his help could come.

III. THE GREAT OBJECT OF HOPE. The prophet saw nothing in existing circumstances which could afford a ground for anticipating better things and brighter days. But his hope was in the Lord, who listens to the lowly, the penitent, the contrite, and, in answer to their cry, delivers and exalts them in due time.

IV. THE EXPECTATIONS OF HOPE. When within the prophet's heart the star of hope arose, to what did it point, with its enlivening, cheering rays? To consolation, to deliverance, to revival of natural life, to renewal of Divine favour. No hope, based upon God's faithfulness and compassion, is too bright for him to fulfil and realize.—T.

Ver. 22.—*Sparing compassion.* At this point the meditations of the prophet take a turn. He looks away from his own and his fellow-countrymen's afflictions and directs his gaze heavenwards. The scene of his vision changes. No longer the calamities of Jerusalem, but the character and the purposes of the Most High, absorb his attention. There is a rainbow which spans even the stormiest sky. Earth may be dark, but there is brightness above. Man may be cruel or miserable, but God has not forgotten to be gracious.

I. THE LORD'S GRACIOUS ATTRIBUTES. These are described as (1) his mercies and (2) his compassions. It is the glory of revelation that it makes known a personal God, invested with the noblest moral attributes. The heathen saw in the calamities of cities and nations, either the caprice of angry deities or the working of inexorable fate. The Hebrews saw the presence, interest, and superintending providence of a God of righteousness, holiness, and grace.

II. THE UNFAILING EXERCISE OF THESE ATTRIBUTES FOR THE RELIEF AND SALVATION OF MEN. If "we are not consumed," it is not through any excellence or merit of ours, but because of the forbearance and pity of him who does not willingly afflict the children of men. We tempt the Lord by our ingratitude and rebellion to lay aside his compassion, but he is greater and better than our highest and purest thoughts of him: "His compassions fail not."

III. THE ADVANTAGES MEN ENJOY THROUGH THE EXERCISE OF THESE ATTRIBUTES. There is (1) a negative advantage—we are not consumed; and (2) a positive advantage—we are saved and blessed. The language of the prophet receives its highest illustration in the dispensation of the gospel. It is in Christ Jesus that the attributes here celebrated appear in their greatest glory, and secure the largest and most lasting results of good for men. Hence the privilege of listening to the glad tidings. And hence the obligation under which all Christians are laid to extol the mercies and compassions of God, revealed in his Son, and practically securing for all who believe the blessings of forgiveness, acceptance, and eternal life.—T.

Ver. 23.—"*New every morning.*" Human life abounds in novelties. It is made up of experiences which combine novelty and repetition. But the mercies of the Eternal are ever new; no day breaks which does not open up some new prospect of Divine faithfulness and loving-kindness towards the children of men.

I. THE SAME MERCIES ARE REPEATED AFRESH. Because a gift of God resembles a previous gift, it does not, therefore, fail in being a new proof of Divine beneficence and favour. The most necessary blessings are those which are most frequently bestowed, and are those which we are most likely to receive without attention and to undervalue.

II. NEW MERCIES ARE CONSTANTLY BESTOWED. The successive stages of our earthly pilgrimage reveal fresh wants, call for fresh supplies from the bounty and benevolence of our God and Father. With new needs come new favours. Varying duties, fresh relationships, and changing circumstances are the occasion of ever-renewed manifestations of Divine goodness. And our repeated errors and infirmities are the occasion of new manifestations of Divine forbearance and forgiveness.

III. NEW CLAIMS ARE THUS ESTABLISHED UPON HUMAN CONSECRATION AND OBEDIENCE. If a human benefactor who has upon some one important occasion come to our assistance deserves lifelong gratitude, how can the claims of God be justly conceived and practically acknowledged, seeing that the hours of every day are laden with his favours? If a motive is needed to a new life, a life of devotion and holy service, where can a more

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powerful motive be found than here? Often as we have partaken of Divine goodness, often as we have enjoyed the assurance of Divine forgiveness, we are called upon by the favours which are new every morning to renewed devotion of ourselves to the God of all grace and forgiveness.

IV. NEW OCCASIONS ARE THUS AFFORDED FOR RENEWED PRAISES AND THANKSGIVINGS. With every new morning nature offers a new tribute of praise to Heaven. Shall man alone be silent and ungrateful? Shall the Christian, who is the chosen recipient of Divine favours, be slow to acknowledge their heavenly source, to praise the heavenly Giver?

"New mercies each returning day," etc.

T.

Ver. 24.—*The Portion of the godly.* When the land of promise was divided among the tribes of Israel, no inheritance was assigned to one of the number, viz. the tribe of Levi. It appeared good to Divine wisdom that the consecrated and sacerdotal tribe should be distributed among the population, and that a regular provision should be made for their maintenance. To reconcile the Levites to their lot, it was declared to them by Jehovah himself that *he* was their Portion. The language here appropriated by the prophet, as his faith and hope revive, is language which every true servant of God may take to himself.

I. THE LORD IS AN INCOMPARABLE AND UNRIVALLED PORTION. Without the Divine favour, the greatest, the wealthiest, the most prosperous, are poor; with this favour, the lowliest and the penniless are rich. For that which pertains to the soul exceeds in value that which is external; circumstances are not unimportant, but to the just and reflective mind they are inferior to what is spiritual.

II. THE LORD IS A SUFFICIENT AND SATISFYING PORTION. With what jubilant, triumphant exultation did the psalmist exclaim, "The Lord is the Portion of mine inheritance, and my cup"! He who made and redeemed the soul can alone fully satisfy and supply it. Well might the apostle assure his Christian readers, "All things are yours;" and well might he reason for their encouragement, "Shall not God with Christ also freely give you all things?"

III. THE LORD IS AN ETERNAL PORTION. Whilst "riches take to themselves wings and fly away," whilst "the bubble reputation" bursts, whilst death levels the kings of the earth with the beggars,—the spiritual possessions of the pious remain undiminished in preciousness. In fact, the true value of the Portion of the godly can only be known in eternity. Here the estate is in reversion; there it is fully possessed and everlastingly enjoyed.—T.

Vers. 25, 26.—*Waiting for salvation.* It is to most persons easier to work than to wait. Yet there are possessions, dignities, influence, which even here and now can only be attained by waiting. And religion, which is the highest discipline of the spirit, encourages this attitude and, indeed, in many instances demands it.

I. THE ATTITUDE OF THE PIOUS SOUL. He who is graphically described in these verses: 1. *Seeks God.* For we are not called upon to be utterly passive; we are not led to expect that blessings will come to us without any exertion upon our part. To seek God in our daily life, in the order of his providence, in the pages of his Word, is a reasonable and profitable exercise. 2. *Hopes for his salvation.* And why not? Has not the Most High revealed himself as a Saviour? And is not salvation the blessing we most urgently need? 3. *Quietly waits for it.* This beautiful expression implies that the word of promise is believed, and that without doubting the soul expects its fulfilment. A rebuke to those who think that seeking God is accompanied with noise and excitement.

II. THE REWARD OF THE PIOUS SOUL. 1. There is what may be called the reflex influence of waiting. The expectant seeker and suppliant finds the very posture he is led to assume good and profitable. "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." 2. The Lord is actually good unto such as wait for him. He is pledged to this. His servants have ever found this to be the case. For the expectation honours him from whom the blessing is expected. The patient are delivered from their troubles, and to those who seek the Lord his glory is unveiled.—T.

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Ver. 27.—*The yoke in youth.* This is not a welcome lesson. It is natural to all, and especially the young, to resist authority, to defy restraint, to resent punishment. As the young ox has to be brought under the yoke, as the young horse has to be accustomed to the bit and the bridle, the harness and the saddle, so the young must learn the practical and valuable lesson of endurance and submission.

I. IN HUMAN LIFE A YOKE IS IMPOSED UPON ALL. In some cases it is easier and in others more galling; but there is no escape, no exception. Labour must be undergone, the daily burden must be borne, restraints must be endured for the sake of the general good, sacrifices must be made, patience must be called forth and cultivated.

II. WHEN FIRST FELT IN LATER LIFE, THE YOKE IS ESPECIALLY HARD TO BEAR. It sometimes happens that youth is sheltered from the storm of adversity, which beats fiercely upon the inexperienced and the undisciplined only in later years. It is well known how severely trouble is felt in such cases; for the back is not fitted to the burden, the neck is not bent to the yoke.

III. THE DISCIPLINE EXPERIENCED IN YOUTH FITS FOR THE TOIL AND SUFFERING OF AFTER LIFE. This is why it is "good" then to endure it. Many of the noblest characters have known trouble in early life, and have thus learned the wholesome lessons of adversity which have stood them in good stead in after years. They who are afflicted in their youth learn the limitation of their own powers, learn the inexorable necessities of human life, and become apt scholars in the great school of Divine providence.

IV. RESISTANCE TO THE YOKE IS WRONG AND FOOLISH, SUBMISSION IS RIGHT AND WISE. It is hard to kick against the goads; it is useless to resent the appointments of Divine wisdom. There are cases in which a rebellious spirit lasts all through life, and it is unquestionable that misery accompanies it. On the other hand, if the yoke be borne early and borne patiently, it becomes easier with custom. And those who are strong to suffer are also strong to serve.—T.

Ver. 30.—*The cheek to the smiter.* Probably these verses should be translated by imperatives. The prophet, profiting by his own experience and by that of his countrymen, admonishes all to meekness and submission. In resistance is neither peace nor deliverance; in patient subjection and waiting is true wisdom, for such is the way to contentment and to final salvation.

I. SUCH MEEKNESS IS CONTRARY TO NATURAL INCLINATION, AND IS INDICATIVE OF A CHASTENED SPIRIT. He who is smitten naturally smites again. But to act upon this principle is to perpetuate a state of war and strife. Revenge is indeed often honoured in the world, yet the world's records are records of the wretchedness which this habit produces. On the other hand, the Christian principle, commended by our Lord in language which seems borrowed from this passage, is a principle of forgiveness and meek submission, the prevalence of which does much to mitigate asperity and to check wanton injuries.

II. SUCH MEEKNESS IS INCULCATED BY THE LORD JESUS BOTH BY PRECEPT AND EXAMPLE. He was reviled, yet he reviled not again. And in taking without resentment or complaint the unjust stripes and blows and many indignities he endured, our Saviour has given the world the most glorious example of victory over self, of superhuman meekness.

III. SUCH MEEKNESS IS CONTRIBUTIVE TO THE HAPPINESS OF THOSE WHO EXHIBIT IT AND TO THE EDIFICATION OF THOSE WHO WITNESS IT. The meek and lowly in heart find rest unto their soul. And society is profited by every illustration of the power and beauty of self-government and self-control, of conciliation and patience.—T.

Vers. 31—33.—*Divine benignity.* It required great faith on the part of Jeremiah and his countrymen to think and to speak thus of God. It was easy for them to believe in the justice and in the power of God; their own affliction witnessed to these attributes. But it was a triumph of faith for those so afflicted to acknowledge the kindness and compassion of the supreme Ruler.

I. IT IS NOT INCOMPATIBLE WITH GOD'S GOODNESS TO AFFLICT MEN. He "causes grief." His providence appoints that human life should be largely a discipline of affliction, that human transgressions should be followed by chastisement. The Scrip-

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tures teach us that we may look all the stern and terrible facts of human life full in the face, and yet retain our confidence in the infinite kindness of the Divine Ruler.

II. GOD OBSERVES A LIMIT IN AFFLICTING HIS PEOPLE. His chastening is for a time. He will not always chide. He will not cast off for ever. For it is not implacable revenge, it is fatherly discipline, which accounts for human griefs.

III. COMPASSION AND MERCY ARE DISCERNIBLE BENEATH DIVINE CHASTENING. It is benignity which delivers the children of men from the waters, so that they are not overwhelmed; from the flames, so that they are not consumed. But it is benignity also (although this is a hard lesson for the afflicted, and a hard lesson for the philosopher of this world) which appoints affliction and chastening. God does not allow our sufferings willingly, *i.e.* from his heart, as delighting in them. It is not for his pleasure, but for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness. And herein we see, not only the highest wisdom, but the purest love.—T.

Ver. 38.—*The source of evil and of good.* This passage may easily be misunderstood. Some have attributed moral evil as well as moral good to the great Ruler of the universe, and by making God the author of sin have introduced confusion into the moral realm. The presence of sin in the world is by the permission of the Most High; but, whilst we cannot understand the reasons for this permission, we are not at liberty to represent him as sanctioning evil. The good and evil of this passage are natural, not moral.

I. THERE IS HERE AN ASSERTION OF UNIVERSAL AND PARTICULAR PROVIDENCE. The inequality of the human lot has ever been the theme of meditation, inquiry, and study. It has been attributed to chance, to men themselves, to the operation of law. But the enlightened and religious mind recognizes the voice and the hand of the Most High in human society, even when the immediate causes of what takes place are apparent. Nothing is so vast as to be above, and nothing is so minute as to be beneath, Providence. The afflictions and sufferings of life, as well as its joys and prosperity, are all allowed and all overruled for good to God's people. And all may become means of grace and blessing to such as receive them in a teachable and submissive spirit. Accordingly—

II. THERE IS HERE AN IMPLICIT SUGGESTION OF THE MANNER IN WHICH GOOD AND EVIL SHOULD BE RECEIVED BY MEN. This is not to be regarded as a speculative question merely, though it is a subject upon which thinking men must needs exercise their thoughts. But inasmuch as we all receive both good and evil in the course of our life, it cannot be other than a matter of supreme concern to us to decide in what spirit all that happens to us shall be accepted. 1. It will be well to remember that there is nothing purposeless; that there is intention, meaning, in all providential arrangements. 2. The devout mind will recognize benevolence in the "dispensations" of providence, will see the movements of a Father's hand and hear the tones of a Father's voice. 3. The Christian cannot overlook the obvious fact that the real good can only be acquired by those who receive the happiness of life with gratitude and bear the afflictions of life with submission and cheerfulness.—T.

Ver. 39.—*Why murmur?* The world is full of complaints and murmuring. It sometimes is observable that those whose lot is peculiarly fortunate, whose circumstances are peculiarly favourable, are foremost in complaint when anything occurs to them which does not fall in with their expectations, which does not correspond with their desires. On the other hand, we now and again meet with the poor, the suffering, the friendless, who display a cheerful, uncomplaining disposition.

I. ALL PUNISHMENT IS DESERVED BY THOSE UPON WHOM IT IS INFLICTED. Conscience testifies to this. God hath not "rewarded us according to our iniquities." No afflicted one can plead innocence, can justly affirm that he has been treated with undue severity. For this reason affliction should be endured in silence and with submission.

II. WHEN GOD CHASTISES HE DOES SO IN EQUITY, AND NOT IN INJUSTICE OR CAPRICE. The heathen attribute to arbitrary and fickle deities, even to malevolent deities, many of their misfortunes. But to us God is "righteous in all his works." To rebel against him is to question the wisdom of the only Wise, the justice of the supremely Righteous. The afflicted should look through the chastisement to the hand which inflicts it.

III. TO REBEL AGAINST GOD IS TO RESIST HIS PURPOSES OF COMPASSION WHICH INTEND

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OUR GOOD. Observe that murmuring is not only wrong, it is most inexpedient. A complaining spirit is inconsistent with the disposition which alone can receive the wholesome lessons and discipline of sorrow and can turn them to highest and lasting profit.—T.

Ver. 40.—*Repentance.* Sin and suffering are the topic of much thought and inquiry and speculation. But it is of supreme concern to the sinner and the sufferer to *act* aright. He may or may not be able to explain the mysteries of the human heart, of the Divine government. But it is most important that he should repent and turn unto the Lord.

I. THE CONDITION OF REPENTANCE. The unreflecting and careless will not repent. There are two conditions necessary to such an attitude of mind. 1. Those afflicted because of sin should search themselves. To take a favourable view of self is natural; but truth and justice require that every man should look below the surface, should explore his inmost nature. Thus the springs of action, its hidden motives, will be brought to light. 2. They should consider against whom they have sinned. It was a profoundly just exclamation of David, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned!" We may indeed wrong our fellow-men, but we sin against our Creator and Lord. Conduct must be looked at in this light, in order that it may lead to repentance.

II. THE NATURE OF REPENTANCE. This exercise of the heart is accompanied with sorrow for sin, but it consists mainly (1) in turning away from sin, and (2) in turning unto the Lord. This involves the seeking of pardon and acceptance, and the acceptance by faith of the Divine terms of mercy.

III. THE PROOF OF REPENTANCE. This may be said to consist in: 1. The hatred and loathing of the evil in which the sinner in his impenitence took pleasure. 2. The love and pursuit of holiness as pleasing unto God.—T.

Ver. 41.—"*Sursum corda!*" Religion takes possession of the whole of our nature. A service professedly of the heart, and of the heart alone, is a hypocritical service, which because of its insincerity God cannot accept, inasmuch as it is contradicted by the life. On the other hand, how can the Searcher of all hearts be pleased with a service which is of the hands, the outward posture and actions only, in which the heart has no share? The true worship and homage consists in the combination of the spirit and the body.

I. HEART AND HANDS ARE LIFTED IN PENITENCE AND CONFESSION. It seems to this exercise that the prophet here admonishes and invites. The heart has been engrossed by earthly pursuits and pleasures; and these it now quits, directing its contrite sighs to heaven, and lifting with it the clasped hands of penitence.

II. HEART AND HANDS ARE LIFTED IN EARNEST ENTREATY. In its anguish, in its conscious helplessness, the heart seeks mercy and acceptance with God; the hands are raised as in supplication, to give expression to the imploring petitions.

III. HEART AND HANDS ARE LIFTED IN BELIEVING CONFIDENCE. There is encouragement to trust in the Lord. The repenting and confiding Church of the Redeemer is ever lifting holy hands to heaven, in expression of that sentiment which is the condition of all blessing. It is the attitude of hope. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills whence cometh my help." And as the eyes of faith behold the God of grace upon the throne of power, they draw the heart upwards; the hands follow, and the posture of the spiritual nature is becoming to man and honouring to God.—T.

Vers. 48—51.—*Sympathetic sorrow.* This passage is sufficient to justify the title prefixed to this collection of sacred lyrics. It is indeed a "lamentation." And, what is deserving of special notice, the lament is not for personal affliction, it is occasioned by the distress and woe of the fellow-countrymen of the prophet.

I. THE OCCASION OF THIS SYMPATHETIC SORROW. 1. The affliction of "the daughters of the city." Whether by this expression we are to understand dependent towns or literally the maidens of Jerusalem, in any case it is the calamities of his countrymen that awaken compassion. 2. This affliction is of the extremest kind, even "destruction." Some of those whose woes call forth the prophet's commiseration are homeless, some are wounded, and some are slain. A hard heart can witness the distresses of

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fellow-creatures unmoved; but a sensitive nature views them with poignant sorrow. Our Lord wept over the same city when, at a later period, he foresaw a fate impending over Jerusalem even worse than that which occasioned the lamentation of Jeremiah.

II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS SYMPATHETIC SORROW. 1. It is cordial; not the sympathy of words merely, but of the heart. Politeness may dissimulate; sincere pity will feel. The sorrows of the soul because of human sin and woe are prompted by sympathy and consecrated by religion. 2. It is manifested. In the East and among simple nations grief displays itself in a more demonstrative way than amongst ourselves. There was nothing extravagant or unmanly in the pouring down of tears, in the running down of rivers of waters from the eyes, described in these verses. The manner in which sympathy is exhibited may vary, but this passage may suggest to us that the expression of compassion ought not to be withheld. 3. It is unintermitted; it ceases not. Such sympathy is not a mere paroxysm of grief; it is constant, enduring whilst the occasion of it endures.

III. THE PURPOSE AND HOPE ACCOMPANYING THIS SYMPATHETIC SORROW. Men sometimes speak of the uselessness of tears, the vanity of grief, etc. The godly sorrow exhibited by the prophet was not of this order; it had an aim, and that aim was the relief of those who were commiserated. Penitence and supplication were regarded as means to procure the regard, the interposition, the delivering mercy of Jehovah. Help, and help from above,—this is the practical design which blends with the anguish and the tears of the Christian.—T.

Vers. 55, 56.—*The cry from the dungeon.* There seems every reason for believing that, in these words, the prophet is recording his own actual experience. Under the reign of Zedekiah, when the doom of Jerusalem was near at hand, the faithful Jeremiah prophesied to the people, and by his warnings and predictions so offended the princes who were in authority in the city that they cast him into the pit of the prison. By Divine goodness he was delivered from this misery by the agency of the eunuch Ebed-Melech. Like a truly godly man, he witnesses to that God who is ever the Hearer of his people's prayers.

I. THE CRY FROM THE DEPTH. It was indeed *de profundis* that Jeremiah raised his voice and called upon the Lord. From sorrow, suffering, destitution, desertion, misery, helplessness, let men cry unto the Lord. The evil condition that impels them to such a cry is not all evil; there is "the soul of goodness" in it. The dungeon of oppression, of persecution, thus becomes a church indeed.

II. THE WITNESS OF THE RESCUED. The prophet testifies that his cry had not been unheeded. Even when immured in a pit so deep that his voice could not reach his fellow-men, his entreaty had reached the ear and roused the pity of the eternal Lord. And he who had heard had answered too, and had sent his messenger to deliver his servant. Where is there a child of God who has not experienced the compassionate interposition of the Most High? The Church should be as one of those temples whose walls are covered with tablets and brasses testifying to mercies received at the hand of the All-gracious.

III. THE CONFIDENT PRAYER. All former troubles were as nothing compared to this disaster which now overtakes the city, the nation. Renewed calamity prompts to renewed entreaty, and the memory of compassionate interposition incites to faith and hope. "The Lord *hath* been mindful of us; he *will* help us."—T.

Vers. 57, 58.—*Prayer heard and answered.* How natural that the mind of a pious man should, in seasons of distress and calamity, revert to the bygone days, remember the clouds by which they were overcast, and take encouragement at the vivid recollection of gracious interposition and help!

I. THE DAY OF DELIVERANCE. 1. This was a day of need and of distress, of sore need and of bitter distress. 2. It was a day of prayer, a day in which Divine aid had been zealously and urgently implored.

II. THE VOICE OF THE DELIVERER. "Thou saidst, Fear not!" How often are these words represented by the prophets to have been spoken by Jehovah! How often by the evangelists to have been spoken by Christ! They seem to constitute a "note"

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of Divine utterance. They are as reassuring and consolatory to man as they are appropriate and becoming to God.

III. THE FACT OF DELIVERANCE. Comforting words are welcome; how much more the exercise of mighty power! This passage depicts (1) the approach of the mighty One, and (2) the redemption of the captive's life. What was literally true of Jeremiah's bodily condition is true of the spiritual state of sinful man; and all temporal interpositions are an emblem of the delivering, the redemptive grace of God in Jesus Christ.

IV. THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF DELIVERANCE. The testimony of the prophet is an example to all who have experienced the blessedness of Divine love and grace. Such acknowledgment should be grateful, cordial, public, and everlasting.—T.

Vers. 59—63.—*The Lord's knowledge of his people's sufferings and wrongs.* The first thought which occurs to people when oppressed and afflicted is—The Lord takes no heed; he has no compassion; he will not help; my judgment is passed over from my God. But it is afterwards felt that such language is language of impatience and injustice. And the pious soul comes to rest almost satisfied beneath the blows and contempt of men, because a conviction springs up—It is all known to the omniscient and sympathizing Lord.

I. GOD, IN HIS PROVIDENCE, PERMITS HIS PEOPLE TO SUFFER AND ENDURE CALUMNIES, REPROACHES, AND WRONGS. Their endurance of such, now and again, is an unquestionable fact. And if there be a God, and such a God as revelation declares, it is certain that he suffers his people to pass through much that is painful to flesh and blood.

II. GOD DOES NOT ALWAYS AND AT ONCE REMEDY THE ILLS WHICH BEFALL HIS PEOPLE. The thought occurs to the oppressed and wronged—Can it be that he sees and hears all that is said and done to us, unmerited as it is on our part? If he does, how mysterious that he withholds his hands from avenging us, from discomfiting our cruel foes!

III. DIVINE DELAY IS NO PROOF OF DIVINE INDIFFERENCE. Christ stood upon the mountain-top, and by the misty moonlight watched his disciples tossed upon the lake, toiling in rowing, and sorely harassed. But he loved them, and if he did not come forthwith to their relief there was a good reason for his delay. So oftentimes men think God careless because their probation is prolonged; but in truth wisdom and love are the motives of all his acts and of even his apparent tardiness.

IV. GOD THUS TRIES HIS PEOPLE'S FAITH AND STEADFASTNESS AND PREPARES THEM FOR HIS SALVATION. After the stormy tempest how grateful is the rainbow! After the black night how welcome is the dawn! The mere contrast, however it might heighten joy, would not account for God's action in testing his servants. But there are moral ends to be secured. And the furnace alone can separate the dross from the gold. The storm alone can try, can elicit, can perfect, the faith of the mariner and his confidence in the Lord who seems to sleep.—T.

Vers. 64—66.—*Righteous recompense.* Our conscience requires and approves of justice. Our weakness is too often in danger of cherishing resentment and malevolence. It is not safe, on most men's part, to hope for retribution upon their personal enemies. Perhaps the record of Jeremiah's feelings is not intended to be taken for an inculcation, or even a permission, of such imprecations upon our foes.

I. THE GROUND UPON WHICH DIVINE JUDGMENT IS INVOKED. 1. It was not personal offence given which suggested such a cry for vengeance. 2. It was the overt, deliberate conduct of men who acted in disobedience and defiance towards God, and with inhumanity and barbarity towards their fellow-men.

II. THE TRIBUNAL TO WHICH THE CONDUCT OF THE WICKED IS REFERRED. 1. Not the fallible court of human justice or human requital. 2. But the court of Divine equity, in which none receives good for evil, in which every plea for mitigation of sentence is heard, and from which none can depart with a complaint upon the lips.

III. THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH RETRIBUTION IS IMPLORED. 1. Not for the gratification of vindictive feelings. 2. Not for the exaltation of the oppressed at the expense of the oppressor. 3. But for the speedy deliverance of God's wronged and harassed people. 4. For the advancement of God's cause upon earth. For the honour of God's glorious Name. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"—T.

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Ver. 18.—*The sum of a terrible experience.* This chapter must doubtless be taken as the utterance of Jeremiah's own feelings—feelings induced by the continual stress and difficulty of his life. Through the first seventeen verses he alludes to some opponent and tormentor continually thwarting his every purpose, not for a single moment leaving him free. Are we to suppose, then, that the prophet really believed all these untoward experiences to come from some one agent who had special designs against him? or was he thus only trying to make more forcible the story of his sufferings? However this is to be settled, some of our difficulty is taken away when we find, on coming to ver. 18, this clear reference to Jehovah: "My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord." These words we may take to mark about the lowest point in reckless and unadvised speaking. They give a sort of confession as to what a deadly member the tongue may become in hours of suffering. What we *only feel* to be the reality is taken to be the reality, whereas the reality may be immensely better. The prophet came to speak in a worthier way, and lived to admit that, in the very depths, he discovered what God's disposition to him really was. Note how the prophet made a double mistake.

I. HE SAID HIS STRENGTH AND HOPE WERE PERISHED. Yet these things, even when composed of purely natural elements, are not so easily destroyed. Even with all the weakness that belongs to human nature, there is immense strength in it. After a long life men wonder to look back and see what they have actually achieved, and the strain they have undergone. While we may be alarmed in the midst of our troubles and vicissitudes, God looks on very differently, knowing how much strength there is to get over them. The resources of our own natures have to be developed, and the resources of grace connected with them. Then, when the strength is brought out, the hope naturally springs forth at the same time. There is hardly a greater peril in life than to act from the conclusions coming to us in gloomy moods.

II. HE SAID HIS STRENGTH AND HOPE WERE PERISHED FROM GOD. *From God.* How came he to say such a thing, or even to think it for a moment? Probably because he had not sufficiently recollected wherein it is that God's favour really appears. To that God who has all power nothing would have been easier than to have made the prophet's path outwardly pleasant and straightforward. But where would have been the gain in that? The thing really wanted was that, when Jeremiah was left alone, bereft of earthly comfort and stays, he should be led into a state of mind where he could say, "Though I seem alone, and in my solitude weak and hopeless, yet I am not alone; for the God who made me a prophet is with me in ways which cannot be comprehended by my innumerable enemies."—Y.

Ver. 21.—*How hope rises from the depths of despair.* This utterance needs to be contrasted with that in ver. 18. There the prophet says that hope is perished. Here he has hope, grounded on a "therefore" and strengthened by a resolved attitude of mind. Thus we are helped to get an explanation of his past depression, or, as we might even call it, despair. We are helped to distinguish between abiding Divine realities and the way in which they are coloured or concealed by our moods. How is it, then, the prophet is here able to come to such an inspiring resolution? Two things are to be noticed.

I. THIS HOPE COMES BY CONSIDERING THE RIGHT THINGS. The prophet says, "This will I recall to my mind," or "take to heart." *This*, that is to say, such things as he goes on to mention later in the chapter. He said that he had been led into darkness and confinement. That he had been *led* was only his own way of putting the thing; the important point to note is that he got into such confusion of mind, such preoccupation with mighty evils, as to be unable to see life in the whole. Darkness had covered gracious truth, or clouds had risen between it and his spiritual vision. We can easily come to the most melancholy conclusions if only we determine to shut certain considerations from the mind. Let it also be noted that, as satisfying hope comes from considering the right things, so delusive hope comes from letting the mind dwell exclusively on the wrong ones. And what is true of the production of satisfying hope is true of other satisfying states of mind. So men may pass from unbelief to the firmest and most fruitful faith, and from selfishness to love.

II. THIS HOPE COMES FROM CONSIDERING THE RIGHT THINGS IN THE RIGHT SPIRIT.

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As the expression may be rendered, there must be "a taking to heart." Loss of hope comes from taking to heart the sad side of human life. The same things are, of course, before us all. There is enough mysterious misery in the world to oppress any human heart that thinks of nothing else, but then along with this we should ever have before us, as things to be searched into with all earnestness, the great facts of the loving revelation of God in Christ Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus, rightly considered, will give a hope rooted deep below the most discomposing powers of this world. It is not enough to place the great facts before us; they must be dealt with as being very dear and necessary to the heart.—Y.

Vers. 22, 23.—*The unfailing compassions of Jehovah.* Here indeed is a full retractation of the reckless falsehood recorded in ver. 18. He who had hinted that God was a Destroyer, that he delighted, as it were, in reducing his children to despair, is now found glorying in the same God as the great Preserver, the one effectual Guardian of man's existence and peace.

I. NOTE THE DESTROYING POWERS THAT BESET HUMAN LIFE. God's mercies are the only guarantee against our being consumed. How great, then, must be the perils of life! Jeremiah had nothing to do but look back on his own experience, and then he would be filled with wonder to think he had got so far. Think of the vivid way in which Paul summed up the perils of his life. It is indeed true that we do well not to think too much of such perils. All the comfort would be taken out of life if we thought of them too much. But there they are, and times do come when it is useful to pass them before the mind. And especially we should note those perils which are perils because they have temptation in them. One of the greatest perils of life is to make an inadequate estimate of perils. The greatest of all perils is to be false to truth and goodness for the sake of life or even of temporal prosperity. Our passions, our fears, and our pride are all ready to league with the great enemy of God and of mankind.

II. NOTE THE ONLY ADEQUATE DEFENCE AGAINST THESE DESTROYING POWERS. 1. *That defence is to be found in Jehovah.* With him alone is the might and the power requisite to make due provision. Man is ignorant and prejudiced, continually going into the way of death, under a firm conviction that it is the way of life. If Jeremiah had been left to himself, to his own prudence and his own notions of safety, the chances are he would have been a dead man in no long time after he had begun prophesying. The true wisdom is to put ourselves into the hands of God. Then the way of duty becomes the way of safety. We are no longer misled by appearances. We suffer from the lesser danger and escape the greater. We discover how true it is that a man may lose his life, and yet in the very losing find it. 2. *The compassion and faithfulness of Jehovah are specially insisted on.* We ask constantly why men do things, and what motives are at the bottom of their doings. And we must ask the same things with respect to God. From the thing done we may rise to understand the heart of the doer. And then, knowing what his character is, we may confidently calculate what sort of things he will do in the future. God's mercies are new every morning—light after darkness, strength after sleep, conscious life with all its large endowments after hours of unconsciousness. And great is his faithfulness. The irregularities and forgettings of human procedure are not to be found in the dealings of God. And this is just the responsibility that comes to us from all the attainments of science, that the deeper we search into the constitution of the universe, the more we should be impressed with the greatness of God's faithfulness.—Y.

Ver. 24.—*Those who have Jehovah for their Portion.* I. EVERY MAN HAS HIS PORTION. That which is his capital, which constitutes his resources, and out of which he has to build up the results of his life. It was only natural that an Israelite should make a great deal of *portions*. Israel had a portion, divinely secured and wonderfully packed with the raw materials of wealth. Each tribe had its portion, given by lot, so that there was no ground of complaint, and so to each household in due time there came a portion. In Israel, as in every other nation, there were the rich and the poor—those with great possessions and those with none at all. Thus there are inequalities, and not the least of them are those which inhere in the constitution of the individual. Our portion depends, not on what we legally possess, but on what we have the energy

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and the skill to use. The greatest of a man's natural resources are in himself. Otherwise he may sit among large possessions which are of no more use to him than are his hoards to a miser.

II. EVERY MAN HAS IT IN HIS OWN POWER TO REMOVE THE INEQUALITIES OF HIS PORTION. Jeremiah shows us how. Whatever his natural portion may have been, it had well-nigh vanished through the hatred of his people and even of his own acquaintance. Nor must we forget that he was speaking in the midst of a desolate land. Many portions had gone and left their owners not knowing which way to turn. But now Jeremiah both assures us of his own resources and advises us where to seek ourselves, by saying, "Jehovah is my Portion." Thus he turns away the mind from mere external property. It is the dreadful character of all mere external wealth that there is only so much of it, and therefore, just in proportion as some grow rich, others must become poor. Besides which there is to be considered that moment when riches will take to themselves wings and flee away, and that still more serious moment when flesh and heart will fail. Thus we see that the complaint about the inequalities of life has more plausibility than force. All purely natural portions are reduced to the same vanity at last, and the man who trusts in them has but wasted his time and procured for himself the deepest disappointments. Whatever we may lack, we need not lack that portion which consists in the promises of God made to them who truly trust in him.

III. THE CONSEQUENCE OF HAVING GOD FOR A PORTION. The life is filled with hope. A man can only hope according to his portion. If his portion is in this world, his hope will have a corresponding character; whereas if his portion is really in God, his hope will partake of the necessary elevation and fulness of his portion. God takes care that those who are really his should have a feeling in their hearts which makes them look forward to a future always better than the present. We are saved by hope. The process is yet far from complete, but it is our right to rejoice that we are in the hands of One who will make salvation complete in his own time.—Y.

Vers. 25, 26.—*God's goodness to the hopeful and the patient.* God's goodness is one thing; that it should be made manifest to men so that they may get comfort out of it is quite another. Bad men will never see God to be good. Not being good themselves, not having kindly, generous, and unselfish feelings towards others, they can never come to look upon God from the point of view necessary to get a manifestation of his goodness. Hence we notice—

I. HOW GOD'S GOODNESS APPEARS TO THOSE BEHAVING THEMSELVES IN A RIGHT WAY. About the first thing that is required is to believe that God is good, however much his goodness is concealed, and however trying the experiences of life may be. We must not be contented to say, "Peradventure something good will come somehow." But rather let us say, "The manifestation of the goodness will depend on our making ready for it." We must wait. So to speak, we have to take our turn. When the seed is sown, the harvest must be waited for. God could give us certain good things immediately, but not the best things. The child cannot receive the things of the man. The servant can only get his reward when his service is completed, and that in a worthy manner. Then besides waiting there is seeking. There is no proper attitude towards God without a combination of the passive and the active. God has made excellence in true knowledge the result of strenuous, long-continued effort.

II. THE GREAT ATTAINMENT IN ALL TIME OF TROUBLE IS TO HAVE A DUE MINGLING OF HOPE AND PATIENCE. Jehovah can save, if only we have what may be called spiritual presence of mind. If we say, "I must get rid of my troubles *now*, or I shall straightway give up the struggle," then, indeed, the prospect of salvation retires to an immense distance. What is wanted is that we should put all our highest interests in the hand of God, and then go quietly about our daily opportunities of serving him. When the passenger goes on board ship at the beginning of a long voyage he puts complete confidence in the captain, and thus he hopes and quietly waits for the voyage to come to an end. Through all perils of the sea he can only hope and quietly wait, knowing that the master of the vessel is the only one who can guard against the perils. And so in the voyage of life; we cannot shorten it, we cannot determine what its circumstances will be; but we can put ourselves in the hands of the great Guide. He will look after our safety, if we only take heed to our part in the

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doing of his work. Let silent waiting be our rule. We are very likely to say foolish things in our criticism of the Divine ways, and therefore it is well to keep silent. But while we are silent we may think a great deal. That is good advice of the psalmist, "Commune with your own heart . . . and be *still*." It is through inward questionings and discontent with received traditions that we are to get at the comfortable truth at last. But if we go on talking we are very likely to discompose and mislead others. The moods in which we are doubting, fearful, and weary, we should do our very best to keep to ourselves.—Y.

Ver. 27.—*The discipline of youth.* Remember how early Jeremiah was called to prophesy. He says at the beginning, "Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child" (Jer. i. 6). He had to bear the yoke in his youth, and doubtless this did much to fit him for a useful and well-controlled life afterwards. The comparison, of course, is plain. An ox might be put under the yoke when quite young, and then, though the restraint would be irksome for a while, at last the sense of restraint would pass away, and the yoke become second nature; whereas if an ox had never been tried with the yoke until full-grown, the chances were it would not accept it in a docile and serviceable way. There is this difference between the youthful ox and the youthful human being, that the youthful ox is entirely in the hands of his master, while the youthful human being has his own choice. For we do not take the yoke here to mean chiefly the external circumstances of life. The yoke is that which we take upon ourselves, seeing that it is the right and manly thing to do. Self-denial is a yoke. The effort needful in forming right habits is a yoke. The subordination of the present to the future, the lower to the higher, the human to the Divine, is a yoke. Not that we are to leave external circumstances altogether out of the question. Men who had hard times when young have come to be thankful, in after years, for those very hard times. It is better to be an orphan than to be the child of parents who have both the means and the disposition which make them lavishly indulgent. Only bear in mind that external circumstances have not in themselves any disciplining power. The materials of a yoke might be used to make something else. The decision rests with us. One may make a yoke out of prosperity and favourable circumstances, while another so chafes and sulks under adversity as to become worse every day.—Y.

Vers. 31—33.—*God's good purposes in causing pain.* All this is the language of hope and continues naturally what is said in vers. 21 and 24. The existence of present trouble presses upon the heart, but along with it there is the confident assurance of future deliverance. Observe, then, certain admissions, along with the cheering qualifications which accompany them.

I. THE LORD CASTS OFF. There is a discontinuance of the signs of his presence. Enemies get their own way, and, worst of all, the prophets find no vision from the Lord. He is not towards Israel as he used to be. But then, what a qualification comes in! *Not for ever.* Indeed, the casting off only emphasizes the bringing back. The casting off must not be taken too literally. God does not cast off as men do. They cast off and do not wish to bring back, or, if they so wish, they find they are not able. When God casts off, though there is a feeling of separation, and something is lost that is not to be gained by any effort, still the truth remains that in God even the castaway lives and moves and has his being. God casts men off, as it were, that they may realize their weakness and true state, and then, when they make the full discovery, God's hand is stretched out to restore.

II. THE LORD CAUSES GRIEF. Great grief, pain of body and pain of heart, must have come from the casting off. And it is of no use to make nice distinctions between God causing pain and permitting pain. Really we do not know much about the causes of pain, and it may be that we attribute to God much that we ourselves produce. The one clear thing is that God shows forth a multitude of mercies. To most of us a multitude of mercies came before there were any pains at all, and the mercies remain through the pains, even though at times they be greatly eclipsed. We may be wrong in attributing the infliction of pain to God, hampered as we too often are by the conceptions of earlier ages. But we can never be wrong in glorifying God for the multitude of his mercies. We may spoil and misuse the mercies and thus

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make pain, but the mercies we could not get for ourselves. Our very wrong-doing makes fresh mercies to arise in view. They are many, and each one of them is a great deep of love and wisdom.

III. THE LORD AFFLICTS THE CHILDREN OF MEN. This is but saying what is already said. The new thing is the qualification. He does not do it *willingly*. The distinction is plain between injury inflicted with malice and injury inflicted with reluctance. There have been, and, alas! there still are, too many who put all their heart into the hurting of others. Their very end is to cause pain; whereas the end God has in view is to remove the causes of pain. The surgeon does not inflict pain willingly—he inflicts it because he cannot help it; and thus he welcomes and utilizes to the full the agent which brings unconsciousness while he performs his operation.—Y.

Vers. 40—42.—*Approaching God in sincerity.* I. THE ASCERTAINING OF OUR TRUE STATE. Such is the exhortation of ver. 40. The talk of complaining people is generally the hasty outbreak of superficial thought—if, indeed, such loose operations of the mind are worthy to be called thought at all. Searching is above all things needful. Beneath the surface with which we are only too easily contented there are deep possibilities of good and evil. Note the figure here employed. We are in a way—further advanced to-day than we were yesterday. There is no standing still. This way we are urged to search and try—asking whither it goes, who are our predecessors, our leaders, our companions. Then note the result of all our searching and testing. The way is one in which God is not. He walks in quite another way, and therefore we must turn to him. Only one result of a real searching is deemed possible. The man without God who yet concludes that all is right, has in truth left the most important matters unexplored.

II. THE RETURN TO GOD MUST BE A REAL RETURN. There had, perhaps, been abundant lifting up of the hands on the part of many, with no lifting of the heart. But many more had not even lifted up the hands. We must not say that posture and gesture are mere trifles. To God, of course, the mere gesture in itself can matter nothing, but from its associations it may matter a great deal. Prayer to the unseen and spiritual One is such a difficult thing that we may welcome every aid. Still, the great matter is to lift up the heart. Lift it up—filled with gratitude, humility, repentance, submissiveness.

III. A SUGGESTION OF THE GREAT DIFFICULTY YET TO BE OVERCOME. God has not pardoned. On one side there is transgression and rebellion; on the other side, God angry with all this. And what is wanted is that Israel should see transgression as transgression, rebellion as rebellion. Here we are amid the confusion of life, and we do not see that for all the worst way in which that confusion affects us we are ourselves responsible. With a humble and repentant heart, taking continual cognizance of God's righteous will, we could ride as in an ark over that deluge which overwhelms others. But with pride and selfishness in our hearts we are strong against all ameliorating forces. We will not come to God that in him we may have first pardon and then safety, peace, and blessing.—Y.

Ver. 51.—*The eye and the life.* "Mine eye affecteth mine heart." More correctly, "Mine eye paineth my soul, or my life;" that is, what I see, so melancholy is it, that it preys on my mind and undermines my health. Note—

I. THE EFFECT OF THE SENSES ON THE LIFE. The eye is more than an optical instrument. The effect produced by the image on the retina depends upon who it is that sees and what it is that he sees. Age, education, peculiarities of experience, will make all the difference. The very exercising of the senses was evidently intended to give pleasure. There is correspondence between the eye and the beautiful and sublime in nature; between the ear and melodious and harmonious sounds; and yet some peculiar experience may interpose, so that there shall no longer be beauty in the beautiful, melody in the melodious. What we *get* from the exercise of our senses will depend upon what we *bring*. The prophet saw desolation all around him where once there had been crowded and prosperous life. What could he do but feel as if a broken heart would be the end of his thoughts? But the spoilers would look at the scene differently, for to them it was the place of enrichment and triumph.

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II. COMPENSATIONS FOR THE LOSS OF SENSE. Loss of vision is a serious matter to one whose intellect is full of life and activity. So Milton seems to have felt, judging from his touching references to his blindness in his poetry. But this makes it all the more needful to recollect the other side. The blind have exemptions from some pains. They do not see the painful sights of the streets: the drunkard, the ragged beggars, the weary faces—weary with incessant struggling for a position or a livelihood. They can guess much of the trouble of the world, but many of the manifestations of that trouble they only know when they are told. We do well to keep in mind and rightly estimate the compensations for natural losses.

III. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE RIGHT USE OF OUR NATURAL POWERS. The expression of the prophet here indicates that he was in the right way. To have looked on such a scene with indifference or only mild regret would have argued a very wrong state of mind indeed. Surely in the judgment the question to many will be, "What use did you make of your eyesight? Did you gather up impressions which made you feel how deep is the spiritual sickness of the world, how certain it is that only Christ can make the world better? And further, did you lend practical help to bring men within reach of the saving power of Christ?" To this extent it will be better in the day of judgment for many blind than for those who have gone through the smitten world with both eyes open and yet as if they did not see.—Y.

Ver. 55.—*Jeremiah calling out of the dungeon.* This is no mere figure for a great extremity, as we are made to feel when we read ch. xxxviii. of the prophecies. It was not from amid mere restraint that the prophet cried, but from miry depths, most perilous, painful, and disgusting. Note—

I. THE PUTTING INTO THE DUNGEON. God does not stretch forth his hand to prevent his servants from being put into such dreadful circumstances. He looks on while they are haled to prison and even to death. For a lesson has to be taught with regard to the limitations of human power. Jeremiah's enemies might say to him, while down in the miry pit, "Where is now thy God?" but this was because they estimated God's favour to men according to the presence or absence of certain outward things. God's favour is not shown by preserving us in certain external possessions. Even life may have to be yielded for his sake. God does not interfere miraculously, even with the conduct of wicked men, unless there is some very special reason. What he says is, "You shall really be safe whatever men may do." He who allowed his Son to be put to death, did then open wide, so that no man can shut it, the gate that leads to eternal life.

II. THE TAKING OUT OF THE DUNGEON. This was in answer to prayer. And the prayer came from a spirit of trust that no gloom and discomfort of the pit could destroy. If Jeremiah had allowed himself to say that his conjunction with Jehovah had been a mere delusion, then he might have been left in the pit. And even with all his faith he might have been left in the pit. But then there would have been a clear assurance that death was better than life. And, indeed, it is probable that, if God had allowed his servant to go out of the world at the hands of his enemies, he might have been spared a great deal of pain and sorrow. What is to be looked to in these matters is, not the present ease of the individual, but the best way in which his life can be used for the good of men and the glory of God. Prisons are no prisons, pits are no pits, if God chooses to give to his servants liberty and continue to them their natural life. In one way or another he brings his servants out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay.—Y.

Vers. 60—66.—*Jeremiah and his enemies.* I. THE PROCEEDINGS OF THESE ENEMIES. The spirit of vengeance is in their hearts. Jeremiah has spoken steadily against them what Jehovah had laid on him to say. They know the language in which they have been described. It was, of course, just the thing to be expected that bad men should cherish vengeful purposes. And Jeremiah had to bear the consciousness of this—the very painful consciousness that he was the cause, however innocent, of showing up the worst passions in the hearts of others. This spirit of vengeance manifested itself in two ways. 1. *Reproach.* He was called all sorts of names, held up to derision and execration. He indeed had to reproach, but then there was a measure and dignity in

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the words he employed. His reproaches were meant to call the reproached ones to repentance. But the reproaches from his enemies meant immediate danger to him—danger from the populace on the one hand, and the authorities on the other. 2. *Plotting.* Society was just in the state when plots could be carried out with success. Jeremiah did not make one enemy or a few enemies, but many. They were wicked men, and doubtless had subordinates ready to hand for any knavery that was going on.

II. JEREMIAH'S BELIEF THAT GOD'S EYE WAS UPON THESE ENEMIES. "Thou hast seen." It is a great matter to feel that God has his eye upon all human wickedness. We may suffer greatly from it, and yet see only a very small part of what he sees. We are for ever running into extremes, exaggerating or palliating, magnifying the reality or else diminishing it. We look at things too much in reference to our individual selves, and as they concern us. But God sees things as they truly are, in all their relations and possibilities. Some things are worse than we think them, others better. And so we are enabled to feel that all wickedness is kept within comparatively innocuous limits. The mischief only reaches the outside of what is attacked, for the same God who watches the wicked watches the good at the same time.

III. THE PRAYER OF JEREMIAH. (Vers. 64—66.) The vehemence, the almost savageness of these words staggers us. But then, we are not to expect the gentleness of a Christian from an old Jewish prophet. We are not required to justify every petition of God's servants. We have to distinguish between the prophet taken out of himself by inspiration and the man of like passions with ourselves, who has to pass through a long discipline before he can pray as he ought to pray. We may feel here that a silent waiting upon God would have been better than any imprecations of vengeance, and yet, at the same time, we must acquit Jeremiah of anything like personal malice. He wished that the wicked might be recompensed *according* to the work of their hands. The wicked wished Jeremiah to be treated according to the ferocity of their own hearts.—Y.

Ver. 63.—*The music of the wicked.* I. THE PLEASURES OF BAD MEN. Musical tastes are, of course, irrespective of moral character. There are certain original qualities both in eye and ear which remain and demand satisfaction, whatever the moral character may become. If a person of musical tastes becomes a Christian, than his Christianity may be the better for his music, or possibly, if he is not careful, it may become worse. On the other hand, if a person of musical tastes becomes an utterly selfish and self-indulgent man, then music will become the instrument of all that is bad. And so we find that great excellence in arts has been found intermingled with the grossest profligacy. Men are not necessarily better because intellect and tastes have been cultivated. The only power which, allowed to work, must make men better is the Holy Spirit of God, and where he is working, such things as music and pictures may be welcomed to give additional beauty.

II. A MALIGNANT TENDENCY IN THE PLEASURES OF BAD MEN. Bad men must ever be hindered and thwarted by the good, and when the bad get any sort of temporary triumph over the good, they will make it a cause of exultation. To some degraded and embittered hearts great is the pleasure of giving pain. This is the peril of satirists. Great intellectual gifts and powers of literary expression are concentrated on a few polished verses, which pain the subject of them all his life. There is no diviner instrument than pain as a means to an end, but surely that heart is set on fire of hell that can make pain an end in itself.—Y.

Ver. 64.—*The principle of retribution.* Whatever the feelings in the prophet's heart may have been, at all events he lays down something like a principle on which he expects God will act in dealing with the wicked. It is not because he hates them, or because they have hurt *him*, that he wants them to suffer, but because they have done wrong. Further, he wants to see them dealt with according to the wrong they have done. Perhaps we ought to look at this question of recompense apart from its being made a matter of prayer. One would not like to think of it as a desirable petition in any prayer, that the wicked might be dealt with according to their wickedness. God's law will secure all that is necessary, and we may trust the working of that law. Men will be recompensed according to the work of their hand, only this expression, "the

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work of their hand," must be taken with a very liberal meaning. What the heart of the wicked purposes, his hand generally carries out to some extent, and yet many qualifications must be made. To go literally according to the work of the hand would be to deal too severely in some instances, too leniently in others. We have to infer the heart from the hand, and our calculation of motives is a very rough-and-ready one. Human law, trying to be just and adequate, is not unfrequently unjust and cruel. We are so under the influence of things seen and temporal that a punishment only looks real when we can see it in operation, manifest to all. Our confidence should rather be that God has so made things by their very nature that a wicked heart becomes a miserable one. Whatsoever a man sows, he reaps. But then there is also another thing to be considered, and that is that God makes room for repentance. He who sows repentance will reap forgiveness and renewal of heart. We cannot undo the works of our hands, but God can bring good out of evil.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SUFFERINGS OF JERUSALEM; NO CLASS IS EXEMPT. EDOM'S TRIUMPHING.

Ver. 1.—**How is the gold become dim! . . . the stones of the sanctuary**, etc. "Alas for the sad sights of the capture of Jerusalem! The most fine gold has lost its brilliance now that the fire of Nebuzar-adan (2 Kings xxv. 9) has passed over it, and the precious stones, consecrated to Jehovah, have been cast out into the open street!" Not that the latter part of this description can have corresponded to literal fact. None of the hallowed jewels would have been treated with such indifference. The expression must be as figurative as the parallel one, "to cast pearls before swine," in Matt. vii. 6. The precious stones are the "sons of Zion," who are compared to "fine gold" in ver. 2, precisely as they are in Zech. ix. 16 (comp. ver. 13, "Thy sons, O Zion") to "the stones of a crown." They are called "stones of the sanctuary," in allusion, perhaps, to the precious stones employed in the decoration of the temple according to 1 Chron. xxix. 2 and 2 Chron. iii. 6. But we may also translate *hallowed stones*, which better suits the figurative use of the phrase. Those, however, who adopt the literal interpretation, explain "the stones of the sanctuary" of the hewn stones of the fabric of the temple, which are described as "costly" in 1 Kings v. 17. But how can even a poet have represented the enemy as carrying these stones out and throwing them down in the street? On the other hand, in an earlier lamentation we are expressly told that the young children "fainted for hunger in the top of every street" (ch. ii. 19).

Ver. 2.—**The precious sons of Zion**; *i.e.* not merely the nobility, but the people of Judah in general. It is needless (as the literal interpreters of ver. 1 are compelled to do) to alter *b'nê* (sons) into *bāttê* (houses) or *'abnê* (stones). The comparison of men to potters' vessels is familiar to the Hebrew writers (comp. Isa xxii. 24; xlv. 9).

Ver. 3.—**The sea-monsters**; rather, *the jackals* (*tannin*, the Aramaic form of the plural for *tannim*). **Cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness.** So in Job (xxxix. 14—16) it is said of the ostrich that she "leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in dust, and forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them. She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not hers." The description is literally true, if we add a detail not mentioned by the sacred poet. The eggs destined for hatching are deposited in a nest-hole scratched in the sand, but there are other eggs laid, not in the sand, but near it, to all appearance forsaken. These eggs, however, are not exposed in simple stupidity, though they do often fall victims to violence. "They are intended for the nourishment of the newly hatched young ones, which in barren districts would at first find difficulty in procuring food" (Houghton, 'Natural History of the Ancients,' p. 198).

Ver. 4.—**Breaketh it unto them.** The Jewish bread, consisting of round or oval cakes (comp. 1 Kings xix. 6).

Ver. 5.—**They that did feed delicately**, etc. *i.e.* luxuriously. The rendering has been disputed, but without sufficient ground. "They that did eat at dainties," *i.e.* pick at their dainty food, is forced. The Aramaic mark of the accusative need not surprise us in Lamentations (comp. Jer. xl. 2). **Brought up in scarlet**; rather, *borne upon scarlet*; i.e. resting upon scarlet-covered couches. The poet speaks of adults, not of children.

Ver. 6.—**The punishment of the iniquity . . . the punishment of the sin.** This is a possible rendering (see Gen. iv. 13; Zech. xiv. 19), but the renderings, "the iniquity," "the sin," are preferable, and yield a finer meaning, viz. that the punishment having been so

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severe, the guilt must have been in proportion. **And no hands stayed on her.** To make the picture of sudden destruction more vivid, the poet alludes to the ordinary circumstances of the capture of a city, the "hands" of a fierce soldiery ever "whirling" a destroying sword. Comp. "the swinging of the hand of Jehovah Sabáoth, which he swingeth against it" (Isa. xix. 16).

Ver. 7.—**Her Nazarites**; rather, *her eminent ones* (just as Joseph is called *n'zír ekhâv*, "eminent among his brethren"). The rendering of the Authorized Version is lexically possible, but is intrinsically improbable. The Nazarites constituted too small a portion of the Jewish people to receive so prominent a place in the elegy. **Rubies**; rather, *corals*. **Their polishing was of sapphire**; literally, *their shape was (like) a sapphire*. But the point in which the sapphire is compared to the bodies of the princes is evidently not the outline of its form, but its gleaming brilliant appearance; so that the Authorized Version is substantially correct.

Ver. 8.—**Their visage is blacker than a coal**; rather, *their appearance is darker than blackness*—one of the hyperboles which seem to indicate that the poem was not written at the very moment of the calamity described (comp. Job xxx. 30). **Not known in the streets.** Another point of contact with the Book of Job (ii. 12). **Their skin,** etc. Again we must compare the lamentations of Job (xix. 20; xxx. 30). Ps. cii. 5 may also be quoted; for the second half of the verse is too short unless we insert "to my skin" before "to my flesh."

Ver. 9.—The miserable condition just now described maintains a sad pre-eminence even when compared with the fate of the slain in battle. And why? **For these pine away** (literally, *melt away*), **stricken through** (with the pangs of hunger). The Authorized Version takes the subject of the second half of the verse to be the famished. But it is, perhaps, more natural to take it to be those wounded in a battle, to whom the expression, "stricken through," is actually applied in ch. xxxvii. 10; li. 4. In this case the line had better be rendered thus: *For those pine away, stricken through, leaving the fruits of the field* (which they no longer need). The word rendered "pine away" would be particularly applicable to those who perished from loss of blood.

Ver. 10.—**The pitiful women.** Strange contrast between the compassionate nature of woman (comp. Isa. xlix. 15) and the dread horrors of this moral as well as physical catastrophe (comp. note on ch. ii. 20).

Ver. 11.—**Hath accomplished** means here, not "hath finished," but "hath poured out in full measure," as in the song of Moses Jehovah declares that he will "spend his arrows upon them"—the Hebrew verb is the same as here (Deut. xxxii. 23). To show the completeness of Zion's ruin it is compared to a fire which **hath devoured the** (very) **foundations thereof.**

Ver. 12.—**The kings of the earth,** etc. And yet Jerusalem had been taken twice before its capture by Nebuchadnezzar (see 1 Kings xiv. 26; 2 Kings xiv. 13). How is the language of the second part to be accounted for? It will help us to an answer if we observe that the later Jews seem to have acquired an exorbitant confidence in their national future ever since the Book of Deuteronomy had become as it were canonical in the reign of Josiah. "The temple of Jehovah" was ever in their mouths (Jer. vii. 9), and the strong outward regard paid to the directions of the Law seemed to them to justify their believing in the fulfilment of its promises. And, in fact, the grand deliverance of Jerusalem in the reign of Hezekiah might, even without this misunderstanding of Deuteronomy, have inspired a firm faith in the security of Jerusalem. A sacred poet had already, on the occasion of that deliverance, declared of the holy city that "God upholdeth the same for ever" (Ps. xlviii. 8), and also (in vers. 4, 5) used the same hyperbole as the author of this lamentation to express the wide-reaching interest felt in the fortunes of Jerusalem.

Ver. 13.—**For the sins of her prophets,** etc. Instead of connecting this verse by a comma with the following, we should rather view it as a unit in itself, and understand at the beginning, "All this hath happened." The sins of the prophets and priests are mentioned together by Jeremiah (vi. 13; xxiii. 11), as well as by Isaiah (xxviii. 7). But we are nowhere else told that the spiritual leaders of the people, in these closing years of the Jewish state, were guilty of shedding innocent blood, unless this is to be inferred from the incident related in Jer. xxvi. 7, etc.

Ver. 14.—**They**; *i.e.* the prophets and priests. **Wandered as blind** men. The leaders of the people are blinded by ignorance, for they know not the only true way of averting calamity, and by passion, for they have not that "eye" of the soul (Matt. vi. 22, 23) which alone enables a man to see the good and the right course for himself individually. The "wandering," or, rather, "staggering" (comp. Ps. cvii. 27, Authorized Version), however, may also refer to the panic-stricken condition of those self-deceived deceivers when overtaken by God's punishment; comp. "wine of reeling" (Authorized Version, "astonishment"), Ps. lx. 3; also the prophecies in Deut. xxviii. 28, 29; Jer. xxiii. 12. The doubt is whether

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"have wandered" refers to some period before the final catastrophe, or to the consternation produced by that awful surprise. The latter view seems the more probable. **They have polluted themselves**, etc. Their acts of violence have been continued to the very end of their term of power. Their garments are still stained with blood when the summons to depart into exile reaches them.

Ver. 15.—**They cried unto them, etc.** As they leave the city they are pursued by the maledictions of those whom they have oppressed. It is **unclean.** The cry with which the leper was directed to warn off passengers, lest they should become infected (Lev. xiii. 45). There may be an allusion to this, but, though commonly accepted, the view is not certain, as the "leper" in the present case is not the person who raises the cry, but those who meet him. **When they fled away and wandered.** The clause is difficult. If the text is correct, Keil's explanation may perhaps pass, "When they fled away, (there) also they wandered," alluding to the "wandering" ascribed to them with a somewhat different shade of meaning in the preceding verse. In any case there ought to be a fuller stop than a comma after "touch not," which words close the first of the two parallel lines of which the verse consists. But very probably "when" (Hebrew, *kî*) is an intrusion, and we should begin the second line thus: "They fled, they also wandered about." **They said among the heathen**, etc. Even in their place of exile they found no rest (comp. Deut. xxviii. 65). This is better than understanding "the heathen" (literally, *the nations*) to mean "the Chaldean army," and the place of sojourn prohibited to be Jerusalem.

Ver. 16.—**Hath divided them**; *i.e.* hath scattered them, like "I will divide them in Jacob" (Gen. xlix. 7).

Ver. 17.—**As for us, our eyes**, etc.; rather (correcting the reading of the first word), *Our eyes were still wasting away (as we looked) for our help in vain.* To the very last the Jews leaned on "that broken reed," Egypt (Isa. xxxvi. 6); how vain that hope would be Jeremiah had already told them (Jer. xxxvii. 7, 8). **In our watching**; *i.e.* earnestly and continually; or, *on our watch-tower.*

Ver. 18.—**They hunt our steps**, etc. Realistic attempts to explain this line have not been wanting, but seem unsuccessful. The Chaldeans were either within the city or without. If within, they would not need literally to "hunt the steps" of the Jews; if without, they had not war-engines adequate to shooting the inhabitants at some distance. Probably the expressions are metaphorical; they are similar to those used in ch. iii. 52, immediately after which we meet with such a purely poetical phrase as, "They have cut off my life in the pit [Authorized Version, 'dungeon'], and cast a stone upon me," (see note on ch. iii. 52—56).

Ver. 19.—**Swifter than the eagles of the heaven.** Jeremiah, or his imitator, repeats the figure which occurs in Jer. iv. 13. There is probably no special reference to the circumstances of the capture of Zedekiah (Jer. xxxix. 4, 5); the escape of many fugitives would be similarly cut off.

Ver. 20.—**The breath of our nostrils.** The theocratic king was the direct representative of the people with Jehovah, and to him the promises of 2 Sam. vii. were conveyed. He was also, in a sense, the representative of Jehovah with the people. His throne was "the throne of Jehovah" (1 Chron. xxix. 23). A similar conception of the king was generally prevalent in antiquity. Most of all among the Egyptians; but, even in imperial Rome, we find Seneca ('De Clementiâ,' i. 4, quoted by Archbishop Secker, in Blayney) declaring, "Ille (Princeps) est spiritus vitalis, quem hæc tot millia (civium) trahunt." For the Jewish, or Old Testament, conception, see Ps. xxviii. 8, where (as the Septuagint shows) "his people" and "his anointed" are used almost synonymously. **Was taken in their pits.** A figure from hunting (comp. ch. i. 13; Ps. vii. 15). The fate of Zedekiah is referred to. **Among the heathen**; better, *among the nations.* The rendering of the Authorized Version suggests that the Jews hoped to preserve at least a qualified independence under their own king, even after their captivity.

Ver. 21.—**Rejoice and be glad.** An ironical address to Edom, who is bidden to enjoy her malicious triumph, but warned that it will be but short-lived. How ungenerously the Edomites behaved at the fall of Jerusalem we are repeatedly told (see on Jer. xlix. 7). **In the land of Uz.** As to the situation of Uz, see on Jer. xxv. 20. **The cup**; one of Jeremiah's images (see Jer. xxv. 15).

Ver. 22.—**The punishment of thine iniquity** or, *thy guilt* (see on ver. 6). The prophet speaks with the confidence of faith, and sees the guilt wiped away, and the danger of a future captivity removed by the purification which the Jewish national character has undergone. **He will discover thy sins.** God is said to "cover over" sins when he remits their punishment, and to "discover" them when he punishes them (comp. Job xx. 27, 28).

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HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Fine gold dimmed.* Gold is a precious metal, partly because it is less liable to corrode than other metals. It will not rust like iron nor even tarnish like silver. For fine gold to be dimmed is for it to undergo exceptionally severe treatment. Such was the treatment of the gold of the temple after the Chaldean siege of Jerusalem. Josephus describes how the gold glittered on the temple walls in his day; and doubtless the effect of the earlier temple's splendour must have been similarly dazzling. But when covered with the dust of a ruined city, smoked with its fires, neglected and defiled, this fine gold would lose its brilliancy. In the dimming of the brightness of the temple mourning patriots saw an illustration of the shame that had come over the nation, and especially of the degradation of the noblest of the citizens of Jerusalem. But whenever rich gifts and graces of God are corrupted we may echo the same lament, "How is the gold become dim!"

I. FINE GOLD IS DIMMED WHEN NOBLE GIFTS OF NATURE ARE PUT TO BASE USES. Nature is wealthy with precious things that in themselves and in the eye of God are purely good. The beauty of earth and sea, the wonder of natural forces, the delicate organizations of plant and animal, all things created by the hand of God, are fine and fair and worthy. And these things are given us as our heritage. Science opens to our use many a secret treasure-house. Art and manufactures result from the appropriation of natural resources. But how often are they degraded by being turned to the service of evil, in constructing instruments of war, in ministering to luxurious self-indulgence, in pampering intemperate appetites, etc.!

II. FINE GOLD IS DIMMED WHEN RARE TALENTS ARE WASTED OR ABUSED. Intellectual ability, artistic taste, gifts for music, philosophy or science, stored knowledge, refined culture, natural genius, and educational acquisitions are like fine gold. Yet this gold may be dimmed: 1. *When the gifts and acquirements are idly neglected.* Noble promises disappoint the beholder with a miserable failure. Even so coarse a sin as drunkenness has its victims among the sons of genius. When sensuality, sordid love of money, self-satisfied conventionality, feverish worldly ambition, or any other low pursuit draws the soul away from the high vocation marked out for it by its own peculiar gifts, the fine gold is dimmed. 2. *When the talents are prostituted to low ends.* The gold may be used, but, instead of adorning a temple, it decorates a voluptuary's banquet-hall. The evil use of it degrades the precious metal. Great endowments are too often similarly degraded. They are used for ill. The painter, unlike Fra Angelico, who, working on his knees and for God, made the exercise of his art an act of worship, forsakes his ideal to please the low tastes of his patrons. The writer neglects truth to flatter the popular cries of the day. The philosophic genius absorbs his mental gifts in mercenary calculations. Thus the fine gold is dimmed.

III. FINE GOLD IS DIMMED WHEN YOUTH IS ILL SPENT. For youth is the golden age of life. If not in liberty and ease, for the yoke must then be fitted to the shoulders, still, in freshness, vigour, and opportunity, it is like the morning going forth in its strength, bright as gold. But when the promise of childhood is belied by the performance of manhood, how is the fine gold become dim! Young men who have not yet lost the bloom of first innocence should beware of the fatal temptations which threaten to cast the beauty and purity of their souls into the mire. We all have an opportunity to begin life well. Some fine gold is then bestowed upon every soul. Let us see to it in these early years that the treasure of a good conscience before God and man is not lost.

IV. FINE GOLD IS DIMMED WHEN A CHRISTIAN FALLS INTO SIN. The graces of the spiritual life are as finest gold. God counts his people as his jewels (Mal. iii. 17). Rare, and bright, and beautiful, glorious and golden in the sunlight of God's love, is the character of true saintliness. There is no beauty comparable to the beauty of holiness. But alas! when the saint trails his white robe in the foul ways of sin and casts the pearls that adorn him to the swine, how is all the glory and beauty degraded! Nothing looks more repulsive than a fine garment besmirched with filth; it is far worse than the beggar's rags, to which dirt seems natural. The fallen Christian defiles himself and dims his gold and brings shame on the Name of Christ by his sin.

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V. FINE GOLD IS DIMMED WHEN THE CHURCH IS CORRUPTED. Like Jerusalem of old, the bride of the Lamb should be all-glorious with grace and goodness. The golden perfection of humanity should characterize this society and make it a worthy kingdom of heaven upon earth. But how often has the fine gold been dimmed, in pagan additions to primitive Christianity, in superstitions of the dark ages, in cruelties and immoralities of the Middle Ages, in Catholic prejudice and Protestant bitterness, in the arid rationalism of Germany and the worldly conventionalism of England!

Vers. 3, 4.—*The violation of maternal instincts.* I. MATERNAL INSTINCTS ARE AMONG THE MOST WIDESPREAD AND DEEP-SEATED ORDINANCES OF PROVIDENCE. 1. *Widespread.* They are shared by the lower animals as well as by human beings. The fiercest monsters are careful of their cubs. The most stupid know how to tend and rear their offspring. Roaming jackals of the desert have their lairs where they give suck to their little ones. The varied fields of animal life all bear evidence to this wonderful instinct. It is seen among all races of men. Brutal degraded classes, untrained savages, fierce warlike people, all possess it. 2. *Deep-seated.* These instincts are far deeper than any merely social tendency. They are strong and vital as appetites. The mother feels for her child as for part of herself. Many desires and habits will be abandoned before these instincts will fail. They outlive virtue and principle and dwell still in the vicious.

II. THE VIOLATION OF MATERNAL INSTINCTS IS ONE OF THE MOST HORRIBLE EVENTS. 1. In proportion to the profound and almost universal character of these instincts is *the outrage on nature* itself that the violation of them involves. We judge of an influence by the forces it has to overcome. It must be very strong if it can conquer great resistance. To conquer such resistance as that offered by the maternal instincts the evil influence must be powerful indeed. Therefore the violation of these instincts must be a proof of a most exceptionally energetic force of evil. Lady Macbeth must have sold herself to a very demon of ambition before she could unsex herself enough to say—

> "I have given suck, and know
> How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
> I would, while it was smiling in my face,
> Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
> And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn, etc."

2. Moreover, the *fatal effect* of the violation of maternal instincts is another proof of the terrible evils of the corruption that can make it possible. These instincts are essential to the very continuance of life on our globe. Creatures that come into the world with so much feebleness as is the case with human beings would perish were they not protected in infancy by the wonderful passionate care of maternity.

III. THAT MUST BE A FRIGHTFUL CALAMITY WHICH CAN LEAD TO THE VIOLATION OF MATERNAL INSTINCTS. Such was the calamity of the siege of Jerusalem. Then hunger and despair led parents to neglect their children. The worst mad violation of maternal instincts had been anticipated in a siege of Samaria, when a mother devoured her own child (2 Kings vi. 24—29). Such things have been done since. They force us to realize the barbarous cruelty of war which some would hide beneath its foolish pomp and pageantry. They also make us see the evil of extreme misery. There is a point beyond which suffering ceases to be beneficial. It then becomes a positive curse. It tears up the very roots of the most precious growths of nature. It drives to worse moral degradation than luxury tempts to, though in the eyes of a merciful God the guilt cannot be regarded with so much wrath where the misery that urges to it is so pitiable. Therefore it should be the work of the Christian philanthropist to remove physical wretchedness, not only for its own sake, but also as one of the first means for preventing crime and vice.

Ver. 5.—*Reverses of fortune.* I. REVERSES OF FORTUNE ARE NOT UNCOMMON. It is not only in the rare case of a protracted siege, when at last rich and poor both suffer from the severities of famine, that we may see some who once fed delicately wandering desolate in the street. All who have gone down into the haunts of the very poor and have investigated the severest cases of wretchedness know how many of the most abject

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paupers have enjoyed wealth and luxury in former years. Even in an orderly society such as our own the number of these violent reverses of fortune is appalling. Let no one boast of his assured comfort.

II. REVERSES OF FORTUNE ARE MOST PAINFUL. We rarely miss what we have never known. There is, therefore, much mitigation to the hardness of the lot of those who are born in the most miserable circumstances, arising from the fact that they have never experienced anything better. But the greatest distress is in coming down from affluence, comfort, and honour to poverty, distress, and shame.

III. REVERSES OF FORTUNE ARE FREQUENTLY MERITED. We must beware of the error of Job's friends. The innocent may and often do suffer from a most grievous succession of calamities. Still, those three men had much to say for their view. Their mistake was in making it universal in its application. It is rarely that the seed of the righteous man has to beg for bread. Good men may have a humble lot and sometimes may have to suffer considerable loss. But usually the greatest degradation and misery follows the folly or sin of the sufferer. Probably the one vice of intemperance is the cause of more than half the cases of the very worst reverses of fortune.

IV. REVERSES OF FORTUNE SHOULD EXCITE PECULIAR COMMISERATION. The happy and prosperous should look out for such cases. The most sad among them are often the hardest to find. They hide in shame and misery. Especially when the degradation is moral it becomes a Christian work to seek to restore the fallen. The Son of man came, not so much to preserve the prosperous nor to raise those who had never known better things, as to seek and to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel, *i.e.* those who had once been privileged and had fallen from their first estate.

V. REVERSES OF FORTUNE DO NOT JUSTIFY LOSS OF FAITH IN GOD. They tempt men that way. "Curse God, and die," a voice whispers into the ear of the despairing man. But it is the voice of folly as well as of sin. For: 1. *We must expect to be governed in many mysteries by the great and all-wise God.* It may be rational to disbelieve in the existence of God; but it cannot be rational to believe that he is, and yet to doubt his wisdom or goodness. 2. *The reverse is often due to the fault of the sufferer.* 3. *It may be overruled for his good.*

VI. REVERSES OF FORTUNE MAY BE REVERSED. So was it in Job's case; the end of the patriarch's life was even brighter than the beginning of it. 1. This may happen *on earth.* In suffering we are too ready to lose heart. We paint the future in dark shades manufactured solely from present experiences. But there are more resources in the world than we dream of. 2. It will surely come *in the next world* to all who trust in God. Then the second reverse will be as joyous as the first was miserable. For the same principle will apply in both cases, and the great change will heighten the sense of the new condition. Happy are they who, in Christ, though suffering and despised, are looking forward to this glorious reverse of their present dark fortunes.

Ver. 12.—*Incredible calamities.* Not only had Jerusalem believed herself invincible, but she had been so long preserved in safety and so signally delivered in extreme danger, as in the Assyrian invasion when Hezekiah was king, that neighbouring nations had come to look upon her as secure from harm, and to regard such calamities as those which came in the wake of the Chaldean invasion as incredible. There are men whose condition in the eyes of the world is as safe as that of Jerusalem was to the kings of the earth, and who nevertheless may fall into a greater ruin than the overthrow of Jerusalem.

I. THE CAUSES OF POPULAR DISBELIEF IN APPROACHING CALAMITIES. 1. *Self-confidence.* Jerusalem believed herself to be safe. Proud in the favour of Heaven, she scorned to fear danger. This attitude of assurance impressed her neighbours. They thought there must be good ground for such loud bravado, or they did not think but simply acquiesced in the opinion of herself which the boastful city published abroad. Thus does the world often take men at their own estimates of themselves, not troubling to test these partial verdicts. 2. *Previous security.* Jerusalem seemed to bear a charmed life. She had braved many a fierce storm. The enemy had swept up to her very gates. But there they had been flung back by mysterious interventions of Providence. So the world believes in the prosperity of the prosperous. She indolently takes for granted that what has been will be.

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II. THE FOLLY OF POPULAR DISBELIEF IN APPROACHING CALAMITIES. 1. *Insufficient evidence.* The grounds of this notion are irrational. It is foolish to take people at their self-valuation; but it is more foolish for the people thus accepted to take the popular voice, which is only the echo of their own vanity, as a justification for it. And when the past security engenders confidence, they who do not know what subsequent changes of circumstances have taken place cannot reasonably give security for its continuance. 2. *Ignorance of the real sources of prosperity and danger.* The heathen kings knew not the God of Israel. They knew nothing of the secret of Jerusalem's safety in the days of her prosperity, nor did they see the sure presages of her ruin. Worldly men, who do not understand wherein the safety of a soul consists, are poor judges of that soul's prospects.

III. THE DANGER OF POPULAR DISBELIEF IN APPROACHING CALAMITY. Though it is foolish it is influential, because it is readily accepted as an agreeable solace to fear. Thus Jerusalem was deluded by the flattery of her neighbours. When there is a general opinion that all is well it is hard for individual souls to see and feel their danger. In a condition of worldly ease the prophet of repentance is opposed by the mocking indifference of popular opinion, and souls are lulled to sleep with a hollow security that says, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. The antidote to this dangerous anodyne of conscience must be sought in the Word of God, which speaks of judgment, and warns us to flee from the wrath to come for refuge where only safety can be found, not in the flattery of our neighbours, but at the cross of Christ.

Ver. 14.—*Blindness.* The prophets and priests are so dismayed that they wander through the streets of Jerusalem like blind men. No doubt the confused movement of these men as they run to and fro, not knowing whither to turn, is the chief idea in the mind of the poet. But the image of blindness by which he illustrates it is suggestive of the secret of their confusion. They were, indeed, as blind men because spiritual blindness had seized on them.

I. THE MEN WHO WERE BLINDED. Priests and prophets. 1. Blindness would be *least excusable* in these men. They were not like the illiterate, nor even like the mass of the laity. Priests were trained in traditional lore, and prophets had access to new fountains of truth. 2. Blindness would be *most dangerous* in these men. They assumed the position of "men of light and leading." The world was made to believe that whoever else might be in darkness these teachers were fully illuminated. Their blindness was most fatal because they were "blind leaders of the blind."

II. THE CHARACTER OF THEIR BLINDNESS. It was spiritual. These teachers had all their senses and faculties. They could see the standards and chariots and hosts of the invader. They could measure his forces and calculate his movements. They had intellectual as well as physical eyesight. But they could not see the hand of God in the whole transaction. They failed to discern that moral condition of the nation which had called the judgment of Heaven down upon its head. They were quite at sea as to the future. They did not understand the Divine purpose of the chastisement; and they were helpless when called upon to guide their followers in the great emergency. When the wolf broke into the fold the shepherds were hopelessly confounded. So must it be with all unworthy guides. The moment of need will discover their worthlessness.

III. THE CAUSE OF THIS BLINDNESS. Sin (see ver. 13). Priests and prophets had shed the blood of the just. Gross abuse of power and tyrannous violence were iniquities enough to blunt the spiritual vision of the most gifted. This is one of the most terrible fruits of sin. It always tends to deaden conscience and darken the eye of the soul. We must do right if we would see truth. It is not only sensuality, passion, and gross worldliness that debase the soul beyond the power of perceiving higher things, but more spiritual sins—pride, bigotry, self-will, etc.—also blind it. Purity of heart is essential to clearness of vision.

IV. THE EFFECT OF THIS BLINDNESS. "They wandered as blind men in the streets." Darkness of vision leads to confusion in action. We must see clearly that we may walk straightly. A confused conscience will make an uncertain will. Practical truth is not merely a subject for discussion in the seclusion of the study. It is a necessary chart to guide our course by. When the seeing and teaching of this is at fault all life is thrown into helpless disorder.

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V. THE CURE FOR THIS BLINDNESS. This is not suggested here. It is not the function of Lamentations to console and heal. But there is a remedy. For Christ came to "open the blind eyes" (Isa. xlii. 7). He is "the Light of the world," and all who follow him "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John viii. 12).

Ver. 15.—*Contamination.* So horrible is the condition of Jerusalem after the siege that men regard the holy city as an unclean place, like a haunt of lepers or an abode of the dead. They cry, "Go aside! Unclean! Go aside! go aside!" as they would to one who incautiously approached too near to one of these banned spots. The dread of contamination is a natural testimony to the instinct for purity; but it is often sadly perverted, for while no feeling should be more related to truth and fact, it happens that no feeling is more subject to artificial, conventional regulations. We need to inquire what are the true causes of contamination and how real contamination may be avoided.

I. WHAT ARE THE TRUE CAUSES OF CONTAMINATION? It is uncleanness that defiles. The primitive notion of uncleanness is connected with material things—the dirt that soils a garment, etc. Then disease which is loathsome and offensive, and death with its attendant corruption, are felt to be defiling. But to the soul true defilement can only come from what is morally impure. As Christ teaches, it is internal not external (Luke xi. 38—40). Jerusalem, when in her prosperity she abandoned herself to idolatry and immorality, was more unclean than when she lay in ashes a charnel-house of slaughtered citizens. Yet no man cried, "Unclean!" in the prosperous times. The degradation was thought to be defiling, while the sin which led to it was connived at. This mistake is common in various forms. The criminal with the brand of punishment upon him is shunned, while the far more vicious man who has contrived to keep himself safe is courted. Parents fear the corruption of manners which their children may contract by mingling with social inferiors, and yet permit them to mix with far more corrupt society if only the rank of it be higher than their own. Many people look with contempt on certain kinds of honest business, who will engage in pursuits of very questionable morality without compunction. Thus some regard trade as degrading and betting as gentlemanly. They would be ashamed to be connected with a shop; they have no shame in their connection with the turf. We want a healthier conscience, that will declare no honest pursuit to be dishonourable and no immoral one to be respectable simply because patronized by rank and fashion.

II. HOW IS REAL CONTAMINATION TO BE AVOIDED? Granted that we know what things are defiling and can distinguish them from the objects of conventional ostracism; how are we to behave ourselves in regard to the unclean things? We are to avoid contact with them. But here a difficult question arises. As Christians we are to be the salt of the earth. It is our mission to purify the impure. But if we shun it, how can we change it? If we neglect politics because we see politicians to be acting dishonourably, and business because we wish to avoid tricks of trade, and society because we must escape the corrupting influences of unwholesome amusements and scandalous conversation, shall we not be handing over politics, business, and society to the unchecked influence of evil? The answer to this question seems to be that the departure must be in spirit and from the spirit of those things that are degrading. We are not to flee bodily. We may do so in vain. For the corruption of the world may pursue the hermit to his cell and torment his mind with evil imaginations in the desert. But if we forsake all sympathy with the unclean our soul cannot be touched by it. Thus Christ ate and drank with publicans and sinners and passed through their foul atmosphere without defilement. Especially if the object is to do good we may be sure that the consciousness of a mission and the cleansing influence of Christian charity will prevent contamination. Thus a pure-minded Christian woman is able to go into the haunts of vice on an errand of mercy and return scatheless as the snowdrop that lifts its head from the impure soil.

Ver. 22.—*The end of punishment.* Here is a gleam of prophetic hope. From doleful lamentations the poet is able to look forward and see the end of the sad desolation of Jerusalem.

I. PUNISHMENT HAS AN END. Nothing is everlasting but God, and the life which God gives and the goodness of that life. Evil, darkness, pain, and death are temporal

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phases of being. This may seem to many an unjustifiably dogmatic statement. Text for text we may find passages of Scripture to support it and to contradict it. It is when we take into account the drift of the whole Word of God, the character of God therein revealed and the purposes of punishment and of all dark facts of providence as far as these purposes are made known to us, that we are led more and more to believe in the victory and duration of the blessed and the overthrow and cessation of the evil phases of experience.

II. THE END OF PUNISHMENT IS DETERMINED BY ITS OBJECT. What is the object of punishment? This may be manifold. 1. *It is not the satisfaction of vengeance in One who is wronged.* For (1) such a satisfaction could only be required by sinful human passion, never by the good will of God; and (2) if such a satisfaction were required, it would not be punishment, which is quite another thing. 2. *It is partly the deterring of possible offenders.* In so far as law must be vindicated for the sake of its future observance the punishment must be severe, but not beyond that point. 3. *It is chiefly for the restoration of the offender.* This was the reason given for the terrible calamities that overwhelmed the guilty city of Jerusalem. Human punishment under criminal laws is so far a failure that the primary end of it is rarely achieved. But with God's all-wise government it is held in view and mainly aimed at. Therefore the punishment is called "chastisement." What is required of chastisement is that it should be sufficient. For it to be endless would be to defeat its object. Moreover, it does not require to be measured by the offence alone. Even if it were so measured it need not be everlasting, since no finite being can commit an infinite sin. But it is measured by the change required to be wrought in the guilty person.

III. THE PROSPECT OF THE END OF PUNISHMENT SHOULD HELP US TO BEAR IT. God sends chastisement on earth. And he does not except any from it—at all events he does not except Christians, for "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." If there were no hope to the chastised, and punishment were a sign of being cast off for ever by God, we might well sit down in sullen despair. But there is encouragement in the thought that it is temporary, is working our good, and may be lightened and shortened by prompt repentance and patient submission.

IV. THE GUILTY AGENTS OF PUNISHMENT WILL BE PUNISHED. Edom had triumphed over Jerusalem. Edom was to have her sin discovered and punished when Jerusalem was restored. So Babylon's doom was promised (Isa. xiii.). Satan, the great enemy of souls, may be used as an instrument for our chastisement. But his day of doom is drawing near. Then he can torment us no more.

V. CHRIST PUTS AN END TO PUNISHMENT. It is not necessary that we should endure our punishment to the end. If we had to do so where would the end be? The awful prospect would shut out all view of any end, whatever we might reason about its far-off certainty. But Christ has accomplished for us by his suffering and sacrifice a work of redemption which will save with full, free, and immediate pardon all who repent and trust in him.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*The gold dimmed.* Present adversity brings to mind, by force of contrast, the prosperity of bygone days. The Hebrew prophet of sorrow might well recall the golden days of old.

> "A poet's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."

His touching and poetic language affords—

I. A LESSON OF HUMAN MUTABILITY. The exclamation reminds us of those oft-quoted words, *Ilium fuit!* Troy was, but is no more! The proudest cities have crumbled into ruins, the most splendid palaces have mouldered into dust.

II. A LESSON THAT PRECIOUS THINGS MAY TURN TO VILE. The homes of kings, priests, and prophets, were possessed by the brutal soldiery; the city of David and Solomon resounded with the ferocious cry of the Chaldeans. Sin can bring the brightest and the most glorious of human societies and institutions into decay and contempt.

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III. A LESSON THAT SACRED THINGS MAY BE PROFANED. "The stones of the sanctuary" were flung about. The very temple of Jehovah became a ruin, the sacred solemnities came to an end, and the voice of the priests and the Levites ceased in the precincts. Sin can rust even the fine gold.

IV. A LESSON OF THE UNSPARING ENMITY OF MAN. The Chaldeans were not deterred by any consideration from carrying out their wrath to the bitterest extremity. The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. *Væ victis!* is an old cry.

V. A LESSON AS TO THE EXACTING NATURE OF DIVINE RETRIBUTION. The hand was the hand of the Chaldean, but the judgment was the judgment of God. When men rebel against him, no human power or splendour can preserve them from his righteous indignation and just retribution.—T.

Ver. 2.—"*Precious sons . . . fine gold,*" . . . *become "earthen pitchers.*" The prophet's appreciation of the proper dignity and value of his nation was naturally very exalted; in proportion were his sorrows and humiliation when his country rebelled against the Lord, and became, in consequence, a prey to the despised and hated foreigner. The reflections are applicable, not to Judah only, but to all the sinful and rebellious among men; for there is no escape from the action of the moral law, from the chastisement of the righteous Judge.

I. THE TRUE VALUE AND PROPER DIGNITY OF MAN. Comparable to "fine gold" in beauty, preciousness, and use, is our humanity when in the state designed by the Creator, free from the corroding rust of sin, and minted and stamped with the image and superscription of the Most High.

II. SIN INVOLVES CHASTISEMENT, AND CHASTISEMENT BRINGS DISGRACE. The striking contrast between gold, fine and solid, on the one hand, and "earthen pitchers" on the other hand, is a pictorial and effective representation of the change which took place in Judah. A holy nation, a kingdom of priests, the chosen of the Eternal, was reduced to the level of the poorest, meanest tribe vanquished and despoiled by an unsparing enemy. Here, as so often, the chosen nation was an emblem of humanity. For though man be by nature the sublimest of God's creatures, when he is abandoned to sin and all its consequences he sinks below the level of the brutes.

APPLICATION. Only Divine grace and power can restore the beauty and dignity of which sin has robbed humanity. The gospel of Christ transforms the earthen pitcher into the fine gold of the sanctuary.—T.

Vers. 3—5.—*The horrors of famine.* A more graphic, a more terrible picture than this of the misery of a captured, starved, and desolated city, no pencil could paint. If the circumstances of the famine-stricken population of Jerusalem are portrayed with too literal a skill and with too sickening an effect, it must be borne in mind that the description is not that of an artist, but of a prophet, and that the aim is not merely to horrify, but to instruct, and especially to represent the frightful consequences involved in a nation's sin and apostasy.

I. PHYSICAL SUFFERINGS ARE DESCRIBED. If the condition of the wretched citizens be examined, they are seen to be afflicted with all physical evils, *e.g.* with hunger and want, with emaciation and feebleness of body, with homelessness, squalor, and filth, with pestilence and death.

II. MORAL DEGRADATION IS DENOUNCED. A siege, the sack of a city, have sometimes called out exalted self-sacrifice and heroism; but they have sometimes been the occasion of the bursting forth into flame of the vilest passions—of avarice, cruelty, selfishness, and lust. In this passage we observe an atrocious exhibition of selfish indifference to the pains and necessities of others, and especially a display of cruelty towards children which contrasts with the parental instincts and tenderness of the brutes. To so low a level does sin bring human nature.

PRACTICAL LESSONS. 1. In plenty and peace let men cherish gratitude. 2. Let those who are prosperous commiserate the famine-stricken and the victims of war. 3. Let generous provision be made for the wants of the destitute.—T.

Ver. 12.—*The impregnable taken.* The natural position of Jerusalem was such as to mark it out for a stronghold, as to invite its possessors to fortify it and to deem them-

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selves invincible. When David conquered it by daring and valour, he made it the metropolis of the nation. Succeeding kings strengthened the walls and completed the fortifications, so that Jerusalem became one of the strongest fortresses of the ancient world. And at this time Nebuchadnezzar had only taken the city after a siege extending through a year and a half.

I. THE IMPRESSIVE CONTRAST. 1. One such contrast was upon the surface and obvious to every eye. The mighty and apparently invincible was vanquished and desolated. 2. Another contrast was apparent to the mind of the observing and reflecting: the city favoured by God himself was abandoned, spoiled, and desolated. If Jehovah had not gone out of the gates, the Chaldeans could not have entered in. 3. The contrast was one universally amazing and astounding. "The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed it."

II. THE INSPIRED EXPLANATION OF THIS CONTRAST. It was not chance, it was not "the fortune of war," it was not the consequence of some political machinations, some military strategy, that the proud city of Zion fell into the hands of the foreign conqueror. Unfaithfulness and rebellion against God were the true explanation. The Lord only forsakes those who forsake him. All men, all nations, endure chastisement for sin. Blessed be God! in the midst of wrath he remembers mercy.—T.

Vers. 13, 14.—*The degradation of the prophets and the priests.* There is a somewhat obscure reference in this passage to some incidents which took place during and after the siege of Jerusalem. The book of Jeremiah's prophecies casts some light upon the language of his lamentations. It is evident that the offices of priest and prophet were vilely abused at this period of Judah's degradation, that the prophets prophesied in false and flattering words, that the priests burned incense to idols, that both professions were debased to selfish ends, and that both were accountable to a very large extent for the calamities of the nation. No wonder that prophets and priests became the objects of national detestation, that Jew and alien alike shunned and hated them.

I. THE NOBLEST OFFICES, WHEN MISUSED, BECOME THE GREATEST CURSE. The priests were "holy unto Jehovah;" the prophets were the commissioned ministers of the All-wise, and they spake his words to men. But when they retained their name, but lost the spirit and the moral authority attaching to their position, they misled and oppressed their countrymen. Alas for the nation whose leaders in Church and state are selfish and corrupt! they who should be an honour and a blessing become then a disgrace and a curse. Let the great and the consecrated take warning, and watch and pray.

II. WHEN SPIRITUAL AND INTELLECTUAL LEADERS ARE DEBASED THEIR INFLUENCE UPON A NATION IS MOST DELETERIOUS AND DISASTROUS. "Like priest, like people," says the old proverb. In modern communities it is observable that the journalists and the clergy have amazing power in giving a tone to public life. Where these are corrupt the very springs of a nation's life are poisoned; all classes are affected by the influences which are potent for harm as they had otherwise been for highest good.

III. THE UNFAITHFULNESS OF THE LEADERS BRINGS PENALTIES AND CALAMITIES UPON THE PEOPLE. The constitution of human society is such that one must needs suffer for another. As the sins of the prophets and the iniquities of the priests had no small share in bringing about the ruin of Jerusalem, so a corrupt literature and a selfish clergy will bring any nation, however powerful, into misery and contempt.—T.

Ver. 17.—*Vain help and hope.* When Jerusalem was besieged by the Chaldeans its inhabitants seem to have looked for assistance fron their Egyptian neighbours. This was a policy and an expectation displeasing to Jehovah, who ever taught his people to rely, not upon an arm of flesh, but upon the eternal King of righteousness. In verse the prophet pictures the attitude of the Jews as day after day they strained their weary eyes to catch some glimpse of an approaching deliverer. How striking a picture of the folly and vanity of those hopes which man fixes upon his fellow-man!

I. THE DISTRESSED AND HARASSED NATURALLY HAVE RECOURSE TO HUMAN AID. As the Jews looked now to Assyria and again to Egypt for allies and helpers, so the children of men have recourse to human counsellors, philosophers, and saviours to

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deliver them from the perplexities and sorrows and fears to which human nature is always subject.

II. IT IS PROVIDENTIALLY APPOINTED THAT EXPERIENCE SHOULD CONVINCE MEN OF THE VANITY OF ALL HUMAN HELP. When application after application fails to bring relief, when hope after hope is disappointed, then, and perhaps not until then, men learn how vain is the help of man, and perceive the wisdom of the advice, "Put not your trust in man, or in the son of man, in whom is no help."

III. GOD INTENDS BY SUCH DISCIPLINARY EXPERIENCE TO DRAW HIS PEOPLE TO HIMSELF. When the eyes are dim and weary with looking earthward for deliverance, then they may be lifted heavenward. And when the help of man is sincerely acknowledged to be vain, then the help of God is at hand.—T.

Ver. 18.—*The end is come!* The progress of the enemy's works, the approach of the enemy's forces, the frequency of the enemy's assaults, all tended to dishearten the citizens of the besieged Jerusalem. The prophet represents the discouraged and dismayed citizens as gazing with terror upon the assailants and their strategy, and exclaiming in despair, "Our end is come!" The dealing and the discipline of God with the souls of the disobedient and rebellious may well awaken the same conviction and elicit the same cry.

I. THE END OF OUR OWN RESOURCES. It is sometimes only when men have tried what is in their power, have done their best to solve their spiritual difficulties and to make their way secure, that, convinced of their own insufficiency, they admit themselves to be altogether in the wrong.

II. THE END OF OUR RESISTANCE TO OUR FOES. Men strive to carry on the conflict in their own strength, and they strive in vain. "Wearied in the greatness of their way," convinced that they are no match for the spiritual enemy, they may confess that, left to themselves, they cannot conquer, they cannot withstand.

III. THE END OF ALL OUR HOPES OF DELIVERANCE. Those hopes may have buoyed up for days and years; but when they have issued only in disappointment how can the discouraged do other than at last for ever abandon them?

IV. THE END OF OUR REBELLION AGAINST GOD. If this be the effect produced by long experience of the wretchedness and the futility of such hostility, there will be reason for gratitude. They who lay down the weapons of rebellion shall receive mercy and experience deliverance.—T.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Fallen reputation.* I. THE WEIGHT OF THIS REPUTATION. The position of the people was comparable to gold in its glitter and attraction. Gold has its use and iron has its use, and we may be glad we have both; but if one of these two had to be given up, it would certainly be the gold. Iron means immensely more in modern civilization than gold. But if frequency of mention is to count for anything, gold was much more valued among the Israelites than iron, and being so, it had a large place in the symbolisms of the tabernacle service and in the splendours of Solomon's temple. Hence any one with a high reputation might very well be compared to gold. People run after such a one even as they do after gold. There is a time when the crowd are not contented to speak well of a man; they must praise him extravagantly, using the language of superlatives, and showing that their standard, if standard it can truly be called, is far from an ideal one.

II. THE CHARACTER OF THE REPUTATION. Had Israel ever been worthy of this comparison with fine gold? On what was the comparison based? It is to be feared that it rested very much on mere appearance. Remember the saying, "All that glitters is not gold." Jehovah had made Israel to glitter by taking it out from among the nations and making it the object of great demonstrations of his power. But, so to speak, this was only gilding over the impure and incoherent mass of common humanity with a coating of pure gold for a certain purpose. The men and women who made up Israel were at heart like men and women elsewhere. But by giving them a certain outward splendour God furnished a symbol of that true golden nation which is made up from individual believers in him.

III. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE REPUTATION. The gold becomes dim. The comparison was once to gold out of which vessels for honour are made, beautifully shaped

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and decorated. But now the comparison is to the common clay out of which the potter makes his cheap and fragile ware. And yet, after all, if gold be a standard of preciousness, these sons of Zion were indeed comparable to it; only the gold is in the unpurified state, mixed very intimately with baser elements that take away the use and glory of the gold. Man in his *best* natural state may have his reputation lifted too high; in his *worst* natural state that reputation may sink too low; but when God takes the natural man in hand and renews, purifies, and disciplines him, then it will be seen that the most splendid and pleasing of visible objects is only a feeble hint of that glory wherewith God has chosen to glorify his own children.—Y.

Vers. 3, 4.—*Natural affection gone.* I. NOTE AN UNFAVOURABLE CONTRAST WITH THE LOWER CREATION. Everything is to be estimated according to its nature. It matters little what the sea-monster here stands for. It is sufficient to know that some fierce destructive creature is thought of. Truly there is a vast difference between the brutes whose very nature it is to destroy in order that they may live, and man who never looks more worthy of his position in the scale of being than when he is doing his very best to preserve life, risking even his own life for this end. And yet even in the most savage brutes there is natural affection. To stoop to a very common sight, what is more suggestive of some of the deep mysteries of existence than to see a cat one moment patiently suckling its own young, and the next moment stealthily and silently making its way to spring on some defenceless bird? If, then, it is put into the nature of these fierce creatures thus to care for their young, what care is it not right to expect from man, the highest creature whom we know? There is hardly any limit to what he can do for his offspring in the way of guarding its weakness and developing its power; and yet how negligent he can become! The lower creation puts him to shame. Jeremiah here speaks of cruelty, but we do well to remember that there is a thoughtlessness, an indolence, and a selfishness which are productive of as bad effects as any cruelty can produce. More evil, it has been truly said, is wrought from want of thought than from want of heart.

II. WHAT IT IS THAT PRODUCES THIS CONTRADICTION TO NATURE? Generally stated, it is the stress of circumstances that does it. "The daughter of my people" would not have become cruel if her life had gone on in its ordinary way. But all at once the supplies that have been so regular become uncertain, and at last virtually stop. The cruelty, if in such circumstances it may be truly called so, is an involuntary one. And yet it is not involuntary in this sense, that the state of things was altogether unpreventable. The famine came from disobedience to God. We are not left to make a superstitious inference as to this connection. It is stated on authority. It were presuming far too much to trace a connection between particular suffering and particular wrong-doing, but where the connection between particular wrong-doing and particular suffering is made perfectly plain, we shall be very foolish if we do not take heed to it. Whatever wrong thing we do will have some evil consequences, and we know not how soon they may come, how widely they may spread, and how much suffering and difficulty they may bring to the innocent.—Y.

Ver. 5.—*Social revolution.* I. AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE INSTABILITY OF HUMAN SOCIETY. We may consider it either as the instability of wealth or the instability of rank. It shows how no class of the community is able to say that, whatever happens in the way of stress or destitution, it will keep right. Men build up societies in which rank comes from the accumulation of wealth or the exercise of power that is in a man by nature. But these human societies thus built up cannot reckon on permanence. Greed is excited on the part of others, and the higher a man has risen the lower he may fall.

II. THE ILLUSTRATION HERE SHOULD MAKE US CONSIDERATE OF THOSE IN HIGH POSITION. The high are of necessity the few. Their position is seen from the outside and from a distance. What we do see is very likely to mislead us, for our eye lights on outward splendour and the appearance of much leisure and the ability to do very much what one likes. But the many journals and memoirs that have been published revealing the inner life of courts and titled circles show that human beings may be none the less miserable because the misery is gilded over. Our pity may be needed at

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any moment for the man of rank and privilege. Whatever the outward differences may be, the inward heart is the same, and that must have its sorrows, its disappointments, and its perils.

III. WE ARE TAUGHT THE NEED OF CAUTION IN GLORIFYING HUMAN CIVILIZATION. What many people reckon to be the highest civilization needs material wealth in great profusion to keep it up. There must be classes to paint pictures, carve statuary, and give long periods of time to the elaboration of artistic conceptions, whatever they may be. And what a satire on all this it is to recollect how fragile and fading some of these art treasures have proved! The ignorant and narrow-minded under-value these things, but then it is also possible to over-value them, to get so occupied with them as to forget the deepest things of humanity, the things that endure. The civilized, refined, natural man may be good, but how much better is the spiritual man, even though he be rude in speech and full of error in his tastes! Truly we may say, he that is least among spiritual men is greater than the highest of attainments among natural men.—Y.

Ver. 6.—*The sin of Sodom.* God was doing nothing new or indefensible in allowing Jerusalem thus to be wasted and humiliated. The Israelites had in their possession illustrations more than one of how great sin had been followed by great suffering. Jeremiah quotes Sodom, and he might have said something about Egypt when God visited it with the plagues. We must not, of course, press too literally the statement that the sin of Jerusalem was greater than that of Sodom. The prophet's aim is simply to insist that no sin could have been greater than that of Jerusalem. If it was a right and a necessary thing that Sodom should be so suddenly visited, so completely overwhelmed, then assuredly no complaint could be made against the severe treatment experienced by Jerusalem. Indeed, relatively, Jerusalem might think itself very well off. If the height on which Jerusalem stood had sunk in another Dead Sea, there would have been no ground for complaint. No impartial Israelite, looking at the privileges of Israel, considering how much it had been instructed and warned, and how patiently it had been dealt with, could do anything but confess that on the whole it had been mildly visited. We must, however, be careful here not to attribute anything arbitrary to God. We shall naturally be very much perplexed if we allow ourselves to think that, though Sodom's sin was less than Jerusalem's, yet it received a greater punishment. It is only by a figure that we talk of communities being punished. Punishment is strictly an individual thing. Communities may suffer, and the suffering will be according to the needs of God's government at the time. The cities of the plain were utterly swept away, that the rest of the world might not become as bad as they were. These visitations have to be looked on somewhat in the light of surgical operations. One patient in the hospital needs to have a limb amputated that the whole body may be saved. Another can have his body saved without the loss of a part of it.—Y.

Ver. 9.—*Sword and hunger.* I. WORSE THINGS THAN WAR. Better, says the prophet, to be swiftly slain in battle than have the slow and gnawing death of hunger. None worthy the name of Christian can but appreciate and admire the zeal, devotion, and self-abnegation of those who toil incessantly in the things that make for peace. War is so dreadful an evil that hardly too strong things can be said against it. And one of the strong things said is with respect to the immense suffering produced by war. Yet after all there is a great deal that deceives imagination here. Suffering is crowded into a small space, and puts on a horrible aspect, and thus it looks huger than it is, and so when we are appalled at the continuance in the world of great wars full of carnage, we shall do well to recollect that war is by no means the worst of things so far as power of inflicting suffering is concerned. Evidently the prophet saw starvation as a more horrible thing than war. It may, of course, be said the war was the cause of the famine, and very likely it was, but then, what was the cause of the war? Good men in their enthusiasm come in with all sorts of ready remedies for great evils, not sufficiently considering how one evil is connected with another, and how the stopping up of one channel may only fill other channels all the more. Who can dry up the fountain of all evil?—that is the question.

II. THE DREADFUL ACCOMPANIMENTS OF FAMINE. Is there anything worse than the carnage of a battle-field? Yes; the pangs of a multitude slowly dying of starvation.

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There is death from disease, death from decay, death of the strong man in full health from violence; but worse than any surely is this slow torment of hunger. What an instance of the rigid way in which law binds us down, unless there be some Divine reason for interfering with the operations perceptible to us! He who intervened to feed the five thousand and the four thousand could have intervened to keep these wretched women from laying their hands on their own children for food. What necessity was there in the one case which there was not in the other? Some there must have been, though we may fail to grasp it as a whole. Doubtless if we could only see clearly it would then become manifest that there is no lack in the giving of food, but that it is we who lack wisdom in developing and distributing what is given.—Y.

Ver. 12.—*A seeming impossibility achieved.* I. THE VALUE OF A REPUTATION. Jerusalem had a far-spread reputation for security. It was a reputation, too, which prevailed among those with whom it was desirable it should prevail, namely, the kings of the earth. A reputation for security is to a certain extent an element in security, and what we have to do is to let it have its just value. For instance, in a world where solicitations to evil abound it is well if those who have all the inclination to tempt us nevertheless say in their hearts that we are beyond such temptations, and therefore it would be mere waste of time to attack us. Jerusalem had probably escaped many sieges through this far-spread feeling.

II. THE CAUSES OF THIS REPUTATION. Here is the value of history. A tradition springs up that Jerusalem is impregnable. Failures in attacking it are contrasted with successes in attacking other places. It is not that any particular invader fails, but different nations and different commanders. Furthermore, the people of Jerusalem come to accept what seems an unquestionable privilege. If it has come to be a foregone conclusion among their enemies that their city is impregnable, how much more may they themselves rest in such a conclusion! But what had made this conclusion possible? Was it the position of Jerusalem? No doubt this counted for something, for other walled places beside Jerusalem have had the reputation of being able to defy all attack. The great thing, however, was the purpose of God that Jerusalem should stand against its enemies. To him must be laid the origin of this wide and deep feeling. He who had been as a shield to the individual warrior became as a high and fenced wall to the city. Jerusalem is the contrast to Jericho. Well-defended Jericho can be made to fall without any visible force, and Jerusalem can be made to stand against the most furious accumulations of the heathen.

III. THE WORTHLESSNESS OF MERE REPUTATION. Reputation by itself is always to be looked upon with caution. If we would have reputation to be a valuable element in judgment, it must be by asking in whose voice the reputation lies. The voice of the multitude, the voice that takes up a cry and as it were transmits an echo, what is it worth? The people of Jerusalem had come to rest in the comfortable feeling that their city was reckoned impregnable. Do not let our safety rest in what other people think about us. If our safety is not of God, if it does not rest in trusting him and obeying him, then sooner or later that will happen to us in our life which happened to Jerusalem. The walls of our life will be broken down, our most precious treasures taken away, our hearts made desolate.—Y.

Ver. 13.—*Shedding the blood of the just.* Consider—

I. THE THING THAT IS DONE. It is not merely that life is taken away; nor is it even that murder is committed. It would be bad enough if even the most wicked of men were maliciously slain—slain, not because of his wickedness, but because of some evil motive on the part of the slayer. But here those who are slain are just men, and slain because they are just. All they needed in order to live on was to fall in with prevailing and popular iniquities. Instead of this, they set their faces against the multitude that are doing evil. They must, as a matter of necessity to their own consciences, say and do things which are a continual exasperation to the wicked. They do not mean to exasperate, they may be in the spirit of their life most meek, gentle, and unaffected; but all this will avail nothing—the wicked are bound to pick a quarrel with them, even as the wolf in the fable picked a quarrel with the lamb. And let it be observed that shedding the blood of the just is only the climax of the persecuting treatment which the just must be ready to experience.

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The wicked are often quite willing to stop short of the climax if they can gain their ends by something less. Not all at once do they proceed to the shedding of blood. It is well for those who, if they be indeed Christians, are assuredly to be reckoned among the just to remember what they have to number among the possibilities of their endeavour to live a truly righteous life. No mere human civilization will ever secure the just man from the risk of having to lose his life for his righteousness.

II. THOSE WHO DO IT. Once again, as so often, the prophet and priest stand forth in a shameful revelation. Their life is so contrary to their office. The prophet whose force should have come from the strong righteousness of his heart within and be directed straight against all evil-doers, is found ranging himself with the wicked and making evil put on the semblance of good. And as for the priest, he does holy things with his hands and offers sacrifices for sin, while those whose lives are a continual protest against sin he hates and strives to slay. Not that we must reduce the prophet and the priest here spoken of to the level of vulgar murderers. Doubtless, in many instances, they persuaded themselves they were right and doing God service. Fanaticism and class feeling, where each one blows the flame of his neighbour's zeal, will urge men on to the greatest atrocities. There may be no danger, most likely there will be no opportunity, that we should go as far as these prophets and priests, but we need to guard against having their narrow spirits in our hearts. We may not shed the blood of the just, but nevertheless we may do much to hinder and trouble them.—Y.

Ver. 20.—*A disappointed confidence and a desecrated sanctity.* There seems to be indicated in these words a great attachment to the kingly office and a great confidence in it. It is the same spirit continuing and probably intensified which caused the people ages before to demand a king. And is it not thus suggested to us what a deep feeling there is in the human heart to have some one individual to look up to as having rule over us? "The right Divine of kings" is a principle which more than once in history has been seen pushing itself to disastrous issues, but that is no reason for asserting that "the right Divine of kings" is an absurdity. It is only an absurdity when a weak fallible mortal holds himself, by virtue of his ancestry and kinship, to have little less than absolute control over multitudes of his fellow-men. The question is not whether kingship is right, but who shall be the king. And especially does this need to be recollected among the changing forms of government so perceptible in modern times. Now that despotisms are tending to limited monarchies, and limited monarchies becoming more limited, and extensions being made of republican territory, it is more than ever important to insist on the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven. Not without deep reason does the proper government for man stand before us in the New Testament as a kingdom. The collective wisdom of mankind can only be at best a puzzling mixture of knowledge and ignorance, prudence and rashness. Blessed is he who feels that the real Anointed of the Lord is the proper Being to guide. Under his shadow we can live the true life in that safety of the spirit which is of far more moment than that mere external safety from the Gentiles, which counted for so much in the esteem of the Israelite of old. In no pits has the Lord Jesus Christ ever been taken.—Y.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER V.

Vers. 1—18.—INSULT UPON INSULT HAS BEEN HEAPED UPON JERUSALEM.

Ver. 2.—**Our inheritance.** The land had been "given" to Abraham (Gen. xiii. 25; xvii. 8), and was consequently inherited by Abraham's posterity. **Our houses.** Not as if the Chaldeans had actually taken up their abode in some of the houses of Jerusalem. The expressions are forcible, but inexact. The land was seized; the houses were destroyed (Jer. lii. 13).

Ver. 3.—**We are orphans and fatherless;** *i.e.* "We are like the most desolate of beings," as the Targum already explains it. Hence in the next clause the mothers of Israel are likened to widows.

Ver. 4.—**We have drunken our water,** etc. The Jews were not yet carried away to Babylonia when this was written, but had to pay a dear price to the new lords of the soil for the commonest necessaries of life.

Ver. 5.—**Our necks are under persecution.** Persecution is here compared to a yoke. But this rendering and explanation hardly

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suit the phrase, which rather means, "*We* are pursued close upon our necks." The harassing conduct of the Babylonian conquerors is compared to the pursuit of a foe fast gaining upon a fugitive.

Ver. 6.—**We have given the hand,** etc. Starvation awaits the Jews unless they submit to one or the other of their hereditary foes. Some escape to Egypt and "give the hand" (*i.e.* surrender, Jer. l. 15) to the lords of the fertile Nile valley; others acquiesce in the fate of the majority, and sue for the alms of the Babylonians.

Ver. 7.—**We have borne their iniquities.** The fathers died before the iniquity was fully ripe for punishment, and their descendants have the feeling that the accumulated sins of the nation are visited upon them. This view of national troubles is very clearly endorsed by one important class of passages (Exod. xx. 5; xxxiv. 7; Numb. xiv. 18; Jer. xxxii. 18). The objection to it is forcibly expressed by Job (xxi. 19), "God [it is said] layeth up his iniquity for his children: [but] let him requite it to himself, that he may feel it!" Hence Jeremiah (xxxi. 30) and Ezekiel (xviii. 1, etc.) insist on the truth that every man is punished for his own sins. Of course the two views of punishment are reconcilable. The Jews were not only punished, according to Jer. xvi. 11, 12, for their fathers' sins, but for their own still more flagrant offences.

Ver. 8.—**Servants have ruled;** rather, *slaves.* The Babylonians in general might be called slaves, by comparison with the "kingdom of priests" (Exod. xix. 6), and the "sons" of Jehovah (Isa. xlv. 11; Hos. i. 10). Or the expression may mean that even baseborn hangers-on of the conquering host assumed the right to command the defenceless captives.

Ver. 9.—**We gat our bread;** rather, *we get our bread.* The allusion in the following words is perhaps to murderous attacks of Bedawins (as we should call the Ishmaelites) on the Jews who attempted to gather in the scanty harvest.

Ver. 10.—**Was black like an oven.** The translation is misleading; there is no real parallel to ch. iv. 8. Render, *gloweth.* It is the feverish glow produced by gnawing hunger which is meant. **The terrible famine;** rather, *the burning heat of hunger.* Hariri, the humoristic author of the cycle of stories in rhymed Arabic prose and verse, called 'Makāmāt,' puts into the mouth of his ne'er-do-well Abu Seid very similar words to describe a famished man—

"Dess Eingeweide brennend nach Erquickung schrein,
Der nichts gegessen seit zwei Tagen oder drein."
(Rückert's adaptation, third Makāma.)

Ver. 12.—**Princes are hanged up by their hand;** *i.e.* by the hand of the enemy. Impalement after death was a common punishment with the Assyrians and Babylonians. Thus Sennacherib says that, after capturing rebellious Ekron, he hung the bodies of the chief men on stakes all round the city ('Records of the Past,' i. 38). Bonomi gives a picture of such an impalement from one of the plates in Botta's great work ('Nineveh and its Palaces,' p. 192).

Ver. 13.—**They took the young men to grind;** rather, *the young men have borne the mill.* The lower millstone seems to have been specially hard, and therefore heavy (see Job xli. 24), and to carry it about must have required a more severe exertion even than the constant turning of the mill-handle. Dr. Thomson "cannot recall an instance in which men were grinding at the mill" ('The Land and the Book,' edit. 1881, p. 108), and both Exod. xi. 5 and Matt. xxiv. 41 presuppose that it was women's work. The conquered Jewish youths, however, share the fate of Samson—

"Eyeless, in Gaza, at the mill with slaves."
('Samson Agonistes,' 41.)

"Eyeless," indeed, they may some of them have been, as putting out the eyes was a common Oriental punishment (comp. Jer. xxxix. 7). **The children.** This is, perhaps, too strong. The Hebrew *na'ar* is applicable, not only to children, but to *youths* at the age for marriage (Gen. xxxiv. 19) or war (1 Kings xx. 15). **The wood;** not the wooden handle of the mill, but the wood required for fuel.

Ver. 14.—**From the gate.** The place where the elders, technically so called, assembled for legal proceedings, and where the citizens in general met together for social concourse (comp. Gen. xix. 1; Ruth iv. 11; Ps. lxix. 12; Amos v. 12, 15; Dan. ii. 49). **From their music** (comp. Jer. vii. 34; xvi. 9).

Ver. 16.—**The crown is fallen,** etc.; rather, *the crown of our head is fallen.* The Jewish people is compared to a rich man at a banquet, crowned with a diadem (comp. Isa. xxviii. 1). Jeremiah has a similar phrase in his prophecies (xiii. 18). It evidently expresses figuratively the prosperity and honour formerly enjoyed by the now vanquished people.

Vers. 17, 18.—These verses form a transition to the final appeal. The thought of the desolation of Zion overwhelms the spirit of the poet. But he will soon be able to lift himself up again when he recalls the sublime truth of the inviolable security of Israel's God. **Foxes;** rather, *jackals.*

Vers. 19—22.—FINAL APPEAL TO GOD FOR THE REVERSAL OF THE JUDGMENT.

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Ver. 19.—**Remainest**; better, *art enthroned*.

Ver. 20.—**Wherefore dost thou forget us**, etc.? The poet does not say, "Wherefore hast thou forgotten us?" One of the psalmists, indeed, does go so far (Ps. lxxiv. 1); but the poet of this lamentation, with a more tender and trustful reserve, adopts the tense of feeling (the imperfect) in preference to that of fact (the perfect), and asks, "Wherefore dost thou [to my feeling] forget us? Wherefore, if Jehovah's power is still unbroken, does he allow Israel to feel herself forsaken?" The fact is certain, viz. that the land of Israel is desolate, and (the poet seems to imply) desolate for some time already. The interpretation is hypothetical, and, as the last verse will show, the poet cannot bring himself to believe that it can be accurate.

Ver. 21.—**Turn thou us**, etc. Not "bring us back to thee," *i.e.* to the sacred land (as Thenius), for it is not a speech of the exiles, but of the Jews left behind, at least for the present, in Judæa. "Turn thou us" means "Bring us into a state of reconciliation with thee." The next petition, **Renew our days as of old**, means, "Restore the old happy mode of life, each man with his own vine and his own fig tree, undisturbed by the fear of invasion, and rejoicing in the sense of the favour of Jehovah." The first petition has the priority because only on repentance and recovered purity of heart and life can Jerusalem rise from her ashes. Isaiah had said this long ago (i. 26, 27), and the elegiac poet repeats it (comp. Jer. xxxi. 18).

Ver. 22.—**But**; rather, *unless*. The poet wishes to suggest that the idea seems to him inconsistent with the covenant relationship of Jehovah towards Israel. May we not compare a striking passage in Isaiah which should probably be rendered thus: "A wife of one's youth, can she be rejected? saith thy God" (Isa. liv. 6)? Both passages express, in a most delicate way, the incredulity of the writers with regard to the absolute rejection of Israel. And thus this melancholy Book of Lamentations concludes with a hope, "faint, yet pursuing," of the final realization of the promises to Israel. The interpretation adopted admits of no reasonable doubt, in spite of the fact that ancient doctors of the synagogue thought otherwise when they established the custom of repeating ver. 21 after ver. 22 had been read, in order to soften the supposed gloomy impression of ver. 22.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*A prayer of distress.* I. IT IS OFFERED TO GOD. The whole of this last elegy is in the form of a prayer. Other laments are interspersed with cries to Heaven. This poem is one continuous address to God. We see here true wisdom; for mere complaining is useless. To wail to the winds is foolish and vain. To make our troubles known to our fellow-men often avails little, for we may only weary them instead of eliciting their pity, or, if we do succeed in gaining commiseration, that may be of little real use to us. But God is the great Comforter. His ear is ever open to the cry of his distressed children. His heart is always tender to feel compassion for their woes. His hand is strong and willing to work substantial deeds of helpfulness.

II. IT DESCRIBES THE MOURNFUL CONDITION OF THE SUPPLIANT. The poet refers to "what has come upon us" and "our reproach." Subsequent verses describe the miserable condition of the Jews in more detail. It is much that we can unbosom our souls before God. The mere relief of confiding in him is a comfort. Moreover, if we desire his help we must make this confidence. Reserve on our part necessitates apparent indifference on his part. We need not fear of wearying him with our plaints. Indeed, if we were more open-hearted in confiding our troubles to God we should come to have fewer troubles to concern ourselves with.

III. IT ASKS FOR DIVINE NOTICE. 1. "*Remember.*" It seems as though God must have forgotten and deserted his children when he has permitted them to fall into grievous distresses. 2. "*Consider.*" We need God's thought for us. Our case is such that the wisdom of God as well as his grace is necessary for our salvation. The great work of Christ is a proof of Divine thought, study, consideration. 3. "*Behold.*" Here is a nearer attention. God is not only asked to remember and think of our case, but to inspect it himself. And when he looks he heals. When once we are assured that God remembers, considers, and beholds our trouble, we can leave it with him, well knowing that he will not mock our cries by listening without answering.

Ver. 2.—*The lost inheritance.* I. THE EARTHLY INHERITANCE OF ISRAEL WAS TURNED TO STRANGERS. Canaan, the land promised to Abraham and his seed, was always

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regarded as more than a mere possession. It was considered to be received from God as an inheritance, and held by a Divine right. Yet even this sacred soil was taken away from the people. Strange races from the East settled down upon it, and the rightful owners were driven into captivity or compelled to pay for water from the wells their fathers had dug, and for fuel from their own woods (ver. 4). A second time the people have been driven from their inheritance, and Turkish mosques now desecrate the city of the Jews.

II. THE SPIRITUAL INHERITANCE OF ISRAEL WAS TURNED TO STRANGERS. The Jews were more than possessors of one little favoured land. To them were entrusted the oracles of God. Prophets and priests gave them peculiar privileges in spiritual things. They were a people of God's own possession. The blessings of the Jews were to culminate in the advent of the Messiah. The Messiah came. He came to his own inheritance, and his own people received him not; for Christ first offered himself to Jews, and Christ was first refused by Jews. In rejecting Christ the house of Israel rejected its true inheritance. Gentiles took up the privileges which Jews despised. We and other nations of Gentile Christendom are the strangers to whom their inheritance is turned over.

III. THE CHRISTIAN INHERITANCE MAY BE TURNED TO STRANGERS. There have been Christian lands, such as North Africa and Asia Minor, which have lost their Christianity and have passed into the possession of the bitterest foes of the Crucified. Within the pale of Christendom the inheritance may be lost. If we permit unbelief to lay hold of people who once enjoyed full faith in Christ, this result will take place. When men who are unbelievers at heart get possession of Christian pulpits and undermine the very faith they are supposed to be preaching, is not this a terrible instance of the inheritance passing to strangers?

IV. THE INHERITANCE IS TURNED TO STRANGERS BECAUSE THE CONDITIONS ON WHICH IT IS HELD ARE VIOLATED. This truth applies to all three cases just described—to Israel's earthly inheritance and her spiritual inheritance and to the Christian inheritance. The land was not given to strangers till after strange gods had been admitted into the land. It was always designed by God that the privileges of the gospel should be given to Gentiles as well as to Jews (*e.g.* Isa. lx. 3). But it was owing to their refusal of these privileges that the Jews lost their own share in them. The inheritance was to have been widened to admit new citizens; the old citizens cast themselves out of it, and so gave place to the new. In like manner Christ never takes the candlestick from any portion of his Church till his people have faithlessly cast him out of their hearts.

V. THE LOST INHERITANCE IS TO BE RESTORED. Whether Israel will return to Palestine is only a question for the curious, and of no great practical interest. For so long as the people are restored to God and truly prosperous it cannot much matter on what spot of the globe they reside. In their palmy days many of them were in the habit of wandering far from their native land. But the true restoration, restoration to the spiritual inheritance in God, is promised to all who will return to him (Isa. lxi. 1—3).

Ver. 3.—*Orphanage and widowhood.* In the desolation of Jerusalem the inhabitants felt like orphans and widows, bereaved of the stay and comfort of life, uncared for and homeless. Many would be literally orphaned and widowed after the great slaughter of the siege. The sad condition of these greatest sufferers brings before our notice the similar trouble of those who are similarly situated in our own day.

I. ORPHANAGE AND WIDOWHOOD INVOLVE OVERWHELMING SORROW. The mournful condition of the sufferers is the first thing to strike us. Their sorrow is keen because it concerns a nearest and dearest relative, and it is the more dreadful because it strikes a whole family. Moreover, the trouble is not simply one of affection. The bread-winner is lost. The prop and strength of the household is cut down. The protector of the helpless is removed. The guide and counsellor of the young is no more.

II. ORPHANAGE AND WIDOWHOOD SHOW US THE BROKEN CHARACTER OF HUMAN LIFE. There is a oneness in a true family. All the members together constitute a unit. But when death claims the head the family is broken and its completeness destroyed. Then part is on earth and part in the other world. The widow and her children thus

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bear testimony to the imperfection of earth, to the transitoriness of what once seemed perfect, and to the need of a future life wherein the severed threads may be reunited and the Divine idea of the family realized.

III. ORPHANAGE AND WIDOWHOOD ARE UNDER THE ESPECIAL CARE OF GOD. He is the "Father of the fatherless and the Judge of the widow" (Ps. lxviii. 5). If God sends exceptional trouble, he also feels exceptional compassion and gives exceptional aid. Helplessness is the greatest claim on the Divine pity. The heavier the need of any sufferers the more likely is it that God will come to their deliverance. It is true that he may not restore lost comforts. A shadow, long and dark, may long lie across the path of orphans and widows. But unseen hands will be tending them, if not for their wealth and pleasure, yet for their peace and blessedness. God sometimes helps by raising up friends. He may also aid by rousing the faculties of the sufferers. Under the pressure of necessity a widow, left with the care of a family, may develop capacities that slumbered in neglect so long as they were not called for.

IV. ORPHANAGE AND WIDOWHOOD HAVE A FIRST CLAIM ON CHRISTIAN CHARITY. Where God's compassion is strongest ours should be also. If the trouble is great and the sufferers have not brought it upon themselves by their own folly or fault, the sympathy should be particularly large and active. The care of widows and orphans was one of the first characteristics of the Church, distinguishing it from the selfish indifference of paganism. With all our desire for the spiritual welfare of men, and all our zeal in preaching the gospel, this elementary duty of Christianity must have a first place in our energies if we would not be justly accounted hypocrites.

Ver. 7.—*Children suffering for the sins of their parents.* I. IT IS A FACT THAT CHILDREN DO SUFFER FOR THE SINS OF THEIR PARENTS. It was apparent in the times of the Captivity; for owing to Josiah's reformation the moral condition of the nation then was better than it had been a generation or so before; yet the blow, which was caused by the greater guilt of the fathers, fell upon the children. It may often be observed in history that the greatest catastrophes do not fall on the most guilty, but on their successors, who are often better men. Thus James II. was a better man than Charles II., though the Stuart dynasty ended in the younger brother; and Louis XVI. was comparatively innocent, and yet he had to suffer for the vices of Louis XIV. and Louis XV. In private life, poverty, disease, and disgrace are inherited by children from their parents. Now, it is a sign of the robust truthfulness of the Bible that this dark fact is distinctly recognized. There is no attempt to shun it because it is mysterious. We have in the Bible an honest, brave confronting of the evils of life, and not a system which is only beautiful to contemplate in idea and which cannot be squared with facts.

II. THIS FACT IS A WARNING TO PARENTS. The selfishness that incurs disastrous consequences on a man's family is too often ignored if those consequences are not immediately apparent. But it should be exposed and reprobated. Thus the intemperate man is sometimes regarded as a kind and good-natured man because he displays no malice of temper. Surely his cruelty in impoverishing his household and risking the health of his children should be considered a gross sin. If a man will not hold his hand for his own soul's sake, let him consider how he will wreck his family and ruin innocent sons and daughters before he yields to temptation.

III. THIS FACT SHOULD NOT SHAKE OUR FAITH IN GOD. 1. Men in all ages have faced it clearly and yet have retained their trust in Providence, *e.g.* the writers of the Bible. 2. The very idea of faith implies that we must confide and wait in the darkness where we cannot understand. 3. The necessary greatness of the scheme of the government of a world should lead us to expect mysteries in it.

IV. THIS FACT SHOULD HELP US TO UNDERSTAND PART OF THE DIVINE IDEA OF LIFE. It is a sorrowful sight—innocent little children plunged into poverty and distress through no fault of their own, solely on account of the sins of those who should be their greatest benefactors! But it shows us that God does not treat us as isolated units. He takes notice of families as such. There is a "solidarity" of mankind. Everywhere we see the innocent suffering with the guilty. Social and domestic life are under providential care. And it may be best for the world as a whole that the several societies and collective bodies of which it consists should be governed with blessing and discipline than that each individual should receive only his own private grace and

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judgment. Moreover, if this is the case, inasmuch as the individuals profit by the corporate life and prosperity, this treatment by families and cities and nations may turn out in the long run to be the best for the separate persons.

Ver. 19.—*Consolation in the supremacy of God.* The Divine supremacy is often regarded as a topic of dread rather than as one of comfort. The awful throne towers above poor humanity, sublime and majestic, and men turn from it to seek refuge at the humbler footstool of mercy. But the writer of this elegy finds deep satisfaction in contemplating the supreme and eternal government of God.

I. THERE IS CONSOLATION IN THE FACT THAT GOD IS ENTHRONED. Above the tumult, above the darkness, stands the throne of God. God is King over all, not only reigning in majesty, but also ruling in might. 1. *Evil is not supreme.* It rears its head in boasts and threats. It dwells in high places. But it does not reach to the highest. 2. *Evil is under government.* Not only is it not supreme, but in the lower domain where it seems to rove at will it is not really free. It is chained, checked, and overruled. The kingdom of God extends over the rebellious haunts of iniquity. 3. *Justice is above all.* Wrong must give place to righteousness. Law must triumph over disorder. The fair order that is the image of God's equitable and righteous will is ultimately to supersede the hideous confusion of man's lawlessness. Even now God is reigning and working through the chaos to the development of life and beauty. 4. *Goodness controls everything.* He who is enthroned supreme is our Father, the kind and merciful God. His rule must reflect his character. For such a Lord to be supreme is for all the law and government of his kingdom to be inspired with love.

II. THERE IS CONSOLATION IN THE FACT THAT GOD'S THRONE IS ETERNAL. The eternal is always of first moment. Whatever be the force, or size, or character of any temporal thing, its transitoriness makes it as an unsubstantial dream compared with the solid endurance of what is eternal. God's eternal throne renders the petty thrones of evil, so hastily set up and so swiftly cast down, like mere passing shadows. 1. *Nothing can overthrow the throne of God.* We see good causes frustrated, good men crushed and bad powers apparently victorious; but they cannot take the citadel. The throne above looks down upon their petty victories with scorn. 2. *Goodness will outlive evil.* The temporary phase of darkness cannot endure like the everlasting kingdom of light. Generation after generation comes and goes; still the grand old throne stands above all, immovable. In one age, wild dreams of new religions possess the minds of men. In another, lethargy and degeneration of character are prevalent. But all these shadows pass, and the throne still abides. Like the rock about which the surf fumes and frets, the throne of God dwells firm and calm in the midst of all earthly changes. 3. *Evil will be made to work for good.* The everlasting throne will draw all transitory things into subjection to itself. We can endure our passing troubles if we are children of God and citizens of the kingdom of heaven, because these very troubles must do the will of our gracious Lord.

Ver. 20.—*Questioning God.* I. IT IS NATURAL THAT WE SHOULD WISH TO KNOW THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S DEALINGS WITH US. There is no subject for inquiry that touches us more nearly or that affects us in such important matters. God's treatment of us concerns our highest welfare for time and eternity. It is in all the experience of life—our many blessings, our varied trials, our greatest prosperity, and our heaviest trouble. Surely it is natural that we should ask whither are all these waves driving us, and why do they sometimes beat so strangely and severely.

II. THERE IS MUCH IN GOD'S DEALINGS WITH US THAT WE CANNOT UNDERSTAND. It seems that he has forgotten us when we are permitted to fall into great and lasting trouble. Short, sharp affliction may be faced. But long-enduring distress wears out hope and faith, and makes it appear more and more as though the lonely sufferer had been deserted by God. The purpose of this is not easy to discover. The whole dispensation is just inexplicable.

III. THE RIGHT WAY TO DISCOVER THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S DEALINGS WITH US IS TO ASK HIM. We often discuss vainly when we have no data to start with. But speculation is sure to fail if it goes beyond all evidence and clear reason. Prayer is the one safe resource. It would be well if we had enough faith in God to confide our doubts to

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him. For it is too often only unbelief that makes us silence doubt. If we truly trusted God we should more bravely confess to him all that troubled and perplexed our minds. In response to such confidence God may reveal to us a new way of looking at our experience that shall help us to understand something of its object; or he may simply reconcile our minds to the mystery—perhaps an equally beneficial result.

IV. WE MAY REST ASSURED THAT GOD HAS A PURPOSE IN HIS DEALINGS WITH US. It is there, though we cannot see it. We may say, "Wherefore dost thou forget us?" and we may not be able to receive an answer to our question. Yet we should not doubt that there is a "wherefore." God does nothing aimlessly. He certainly cannot be putting his children to pain without an object, nor without one that is adequate to the cost. The knowledge of this fact should quiet fear and restless doubt, even if the object itself remains hidden in mystery.

V. WE MUST BEWARE OF QUESTIONING GOD QUERULOUSLY. We have no right to demand an explanation from God. To couch complaints in the form of inquiries is insulting to God. Let the questioning be humble and submissive, and the answers are sure to come in peace, if not always in light.

Ver. 21.—*Renewal.* When they do not lead to improvement lamentations are profitless, though they may be unavoidable. It is vain to mourn the past if our grief does not help us to make the future better. Sorrow for sin is good only when it leads to an active repentance. It is therefore necessary that a true consideration of the miserable condition into which evil living has brought us should rouse an earnest desire for a new and better life.

I. RENEWAL MUST BE THE WORK OF GOD. The writer does not simply resolve to do better, nor hope that a happier state of affairs will come about of its own accord. He prays. And the object of his prayer is to plead with God to produce the great change which is so much needed. 1. *We cannot accomplish the renewal.* (1) We cannot change our own hearts; they are too corrupt and too hard. (2) We cannot bring back the old days. The past is lost for ever. If it is to be equalled or surpassed by the future, a Divine providence alone can accomplish the great work. 2. *God does bring about renewal.* He renews the face of the earth. He sends spring-time into wintry lives. No soul is so corrupt that God cannot renew it; no life is so desolate that God cannot brighten it. We try vainly to turn ourselves. But God is strong as well as gracious. If only he turn us we shall be surely turned.

II. RENEWAL MUST BE IN OUR EXPERIENCE. The mistake is to suppose that God must change to us. But there is no need for him to turn. He is always good and always willing to be favourable to his children as soon as they submit and obey. Till then nothing can induce him to do so unrighteous an act as to turn from wrath to pleasant treatment. The necessary change lies all on our side. Men used to think that night was the desertion of the earth by the sun, and day the enjoyment of his return. They were wrong. They now know that the sun is not thus fickle. So it is with the soul's night and day. A primitive and narrow theology says that God changes—now going, now returning. Larger knowledge shows that he abides the same, and that as our distress is in turning from him, so our redemption must be in returning to him.

III. RENEWAL MUST BEGIN WITH OUR INNER LIFE. The writer wisely prays to be turned back to God before he prays for the renewal of the old days. It is a common mistake to seek for the external fruits of forgiveness before the internal. The first thing is to bring the soul back to God. Other happy consequences will follow. It is vain to pray for the brightness of noon before our part of the earth has revolved towards the sun. It is to be noted that the great change in the soul is a turning to God. God draws us to himself. Redemption is reconciliation to God. To be near him, to trust and love and obey him, to seek more and more of his light and life,—this is the renewed health and blessedness of the soul that is restored from the wretchedness and ruin of sin.

IV. RENEWAL WILL AFFECT OUR WHOLE EXPERIENCE. After the interior life is renewed the exterior also undergoes a happy transformation. The Jew yearned for the old happy days of peace and prosperity. We inevitably clothe the joyous past with a glamour of affection. Many a lost joy seems inconceivably bright now it

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has gone. Yet God may bring it back, if not in the old form, for the exact past is irretrievable, yet in even richer sweetness. The penitent muses sadly over the innocent days of old in the dear home now long since broken up. He would give worlds to bring back that peaceful time before all his sin and shame. It cannot return. But far off, at last, there may be reunions in the better world and rejoicings that will outdo the brightness even of those happy days.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*The Lord's remembrance besought.* The inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem had looked, now to Egypt and now to Assyria, for help and deliverance. Events had shown upon how broken a reed they had leaned. Their experience was now leading the best among them to another and a surer, higher, Refuge. As the spokesman of his repenting fellow-countrymen, Jeremiah entreats the remembrance and the regard of Jehovah.

I. ADVERSITY SOMETIMES LEADS MEN TO SEEK THE REGARD AND FAVOUR OF THE GOD WHOM IN PROSPERITY THEY HAVE FORGOTTEN. That trouble may foster self-control and patience is a commonplace of moral teaching. But it only answers its highest end when it leads the afflicted to seek and call upon their God. In the noon-day of happiness, the healthy, busy, and joyous too often forget him to whom they are indebted for all. Providence is forgotten when the sun shines; clouds and darkness seem to have a natural tendency to remind the soul of God.

II. THE LORD'S REMEMBRANCE AND CONSIDERATION ARE AN ASSURANCE OF HELP AND DELIVERANCE. That the Omniscient is not perfectly aware of all that happens to man is not for a moment to be supposed. The language of the prophet is human language, adapted to our ignorance and infirmity. The Lord will be entreated; he summons his children to think of him; and he promises to draw near to those who draw near to him. The sinner may well dread the all-including gaze of the righteous Judge; but the lowly and believing penitent may well take courage when he learns that the Lord has not forgotten to be gracious.—T.

Ver. 7.—*The moral continuity of nations.* Man is naturally not merely gregarious, but social. The powers that be, an apostle teaches us, are ordained by God—from which we learn that political and social life have a Divine sanction. Accordingly, the Judge of all deals with men, not only as individuals, but as communities. This fact was present to the mind of the prophet when he wrote these words.

I. THE FACT OF NATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE MORAL GOVERNOR. The history of the Jews is the history of a theocracy; but it embodied lessons which are adapted to all mankind. Nations have national privileges, national responsibilities, national probations, national rewards and punishments.

II. NATIONAL RETRIBUTION IS SOMETIMES DEFERRED FOR A SEASON. The prophets appear to have had a clear view of this law. Wrong-doing in one generation was seen to be followed by punishment in a succeeding age. Jeremiah is the author of the well-known proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." The seed (to change the figure) is sown by one generation; a following generation reaps the harvest.

III. THE CERTAINTY THAT PENALTIES WILL BE INFLICTED UPON THE IMPENITENT. There is indeed a sense in which even the repenting and reformed suffer for the sins of those who have gone before them. But for the impenitent and unreformed there is no exception, no escape. We, says the prophet, speaking of himself and of his rebellious and ungodly contemporaries—"we have borne the iniquities of our fathers." The apostasy and rebellion of the former generations were visited upon those who endured the horrors of the siege and the degradation of the Captivity. There is mystery in the providential appointment that, not only shall every man bear his own burden, but that some shall bear the burden of those also who have gone before them. But the fact remains, and it gives solemnity to the life of families and of nations.

IV. THE LESSON IS THUS IMPRESSED UPON ALL MEN—HOW SERIOUS AND REAL A THING IS NATIONAL PROBATION! The teaching which was profitable for Israel is equally

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adapted to England, and indeed to all the nations of mankind. The Lord is King, and from his government and authority none of the earth's inhabitants is free.—T.

Ver. 8.—*None to deliver.* Bitterness was added to the misery of the Jews when Chaldean slaves—advanced to eminence and power on account of their ability—were placed in authority over them. But there was no choice; resistance was impossible and deliverer there was none. In this respect the condition of the inhabitants of Jerusalem may represent that of sinful, helpless men.

I. A CRUEL BONDAGE. Sinners have yielded themselves up to obey the enemy of their souls, the foe of God. This is (1) *a usurper*, who has no right to rule over men; (2) *a tyrant*, who with unjust and unreasonable exercise of authority oppresses those beneath his power; (3) *a cruel master*, whose service is slavery, whose stripes are many, whose wages are death and destruction.

II. A SEEMINGLY INEVITABLE FATE. The conquered Judæans had looked hither and thither, in the crisis of their fate, for some friend and helper, but they had looked in vain. Similarly the captive of sin can find no earthly deliverer; his fellow-men are his fellow-sinners and fellow-captives; there is no eye to pity and no hand to save.

III. A SOLITARY BUT SUFFICIENT CONSOLATION AND REFUGE. The restless waves answer their purpose when they toss the imperilled mariner towards the haven of refuge. Affliction and adversity, chains and dungeons, oppressors and torturers, may make the one only Deliverer welcome. The Lord God has revealed himself to us as the Saviour of all men. There is no prison from which he cannot set the captive free; there are no gyves and fetters he cannot strike off; there are no foes from whose hands he cannot rescue and deliver.—T.

Ver. 15.—*The cessation of joy.* This fate had been foretold. "Then will I cause to cease from the cities of Judah, and from the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride: for the land shall be desolate." Well is it for those who take the warning which is given beforehand, and do not wait, as Jerusalem waited, for the stern lessons of a retributive Providence.

I. THERE IS CESSATION OF JOY WHICH IS NOT PUNITIVE. The health, the elasticity of spirits, the pleasures of youth, cannot be protracted to old age. "Earth's joys grow dim, its glories fade away." Days of sickness, of poverty, of bereavement, of sorrow, are appointed by the Lord of the human lot, to follow days of brightness. The wail of sorrow will replace the song of gladsome joy. Yet all this experience may be spiritually disciplinary and helpful; there may be in it nothing of punishment, nothing of Divine displeasure.

II. THERE IS CESSATION OF JOY WHICH IS THE SIGN OF DIVINE ANGER AND THE FULFILMENT OF DIVINE THREATENING. Such was the case with Judah, upon whom the siege and the Captivity came, not without warning, not without space for repentance. In fact, sin puts an end to the joy which it promises to increase and perpetuate, and brings about the mourning and distress against which it pretends to ensure us. The retrospect of those whose joy has ceased becomes in such cases a retrospect of human rebellion and Divine forbearance. Conscience awakes and admits that sorrow is merited.

APPLICATION. Yet there is a way of repentance. God will renew the days of his people as of old. This is the cry and the hope of the penitent: "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation."—T.

Vers. 16, 17.—*The degradation of sin.* The promise of sin is something very different from this; no flattery is untried, no prospect withheld, which may induce men to rebel against God. But, as with our first parents, as with the dwellers in Jerusalem, so is it in the experience of all men; the promises which sin makes are unfulfilled; the wages of sin are death.

I. THE PICTURE OF DEGRADATION. It is highly figurative language which the prophet here employs; but it is not exaggerated, it is not unjust. 1. The *head* is uncrowned. Judah's independence and freedom was as a crown to the head; but the Chaldeans tore it off and flung it away. They who defy God must lose in so doing all that is most honourable, most sacred, most precious. 2. The *heart* is faint. Judah's joy was turned

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into mourning, her hopes were dashed to the ground; how could the heart be other than faint? The ways of sin are ways of disappointment, weariness, and distress. The heart of the transgressor sinks within him when he sees the fruit of his doings. 3. The *eyes* are dim with watching for deliverance, with tears of woe.

II. THE CAUSE OF DEGRADATION. Judah may have been unwilling to admit the truth, and may have been disposed to attribute calamities to second causes. But the prophet was just, and laid his hand upon the true explanation when he confessed on behalf of his countrymen, "We have sinned!" Trace up human misery and national disaster to the source, and this is to be reached only when we come to defection and departure from the righteous Lord.

III. THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF DEGRADATION. "Woe unto us!" is the cry of the prophet. When men sin and suffer but fail to acknowledge their own ill desert, the intentions of Providence are as yet unfulfilled. The sin must be taken home; the punishment must be acknowledged just; the confession must be penitent, sincere, and frank.

IV. THE LESSONS OF DEGRADATION. 1. Let the virtuous and obedient abjure self-confidence and cherish trust in God. 2. Let the tempted beware of the foe, and watch and pray lest they sin and come into this torment. 3. Let the smitten sinner repent and turn unto the Lord and seek pardon and renewal.—T.

Ver. 19.—*The eternal throne.* The believer in God has this great advantage over the atheist and the agnostic—he has a firm conviction that all things are under the control and rule of a wise, righteous, and benevolent King, who reigns both in heaven and on earth. Afflictions, personal and relative, may distress his mind; calamities may overwhelm his imagination and baffle his reason; but he has this consolation—he knows that the Lord remains for ever on his throne.

I. GOD'S ETERNAL THRONE CONTRASTS WITH THE PERISHING THRONES OF EARTH. The King of Judah, defeated and carried captive, was torn by a foreign hand from the throne of his power and glory. All earthly monarchies are transitory and all earthly monarchs are mortal. They perish, but God endureth.

II. THE STABILITY OF GOD'S THRONE RESTS UPON THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF HIS DOMINION. "A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." Injustice and oppression may prevail for a season, but only right is indestructible and immortal. Even in his mercy the Supreme has regard to the claims of justice and to the maintenance of rightful authority.

III. THE DEFEAT OF GOD'S ENEMIES IS ASSURED. They may rage and they may take counsel together, but the Lord has them in derision. All their assaults upon his kingdom must fail, and those who lead those assaults must come to shame and misery. No weapon that is formed against God and his people shall prosper.

IV. THE VICTORY OF GOD'S CAUSE IS CERTAIN. Kingdoms rise and fall, princes are elevated and dethroned; but the King of kings goes conquering and to conquer. All his foes are put beneath his feet, and on his head are many crowns.—T.

Ver. 21.—"*Turn us again!*" The Scriptures are the volume of hope; they lend no countenance to despondency; they rebuke despair. Deep as was the degradation of the Jews, far as they had wandered from God's ways, inexcusably as they had defied his authority, there was for them a place of repentance. And Jeremiah closes this Book of Lamentations with language of confident supplication and well-grounded hope of better times.

I. THE NEED OF TURNING. The whole of the book thus closed witnesses to this necessity. Judah had gone wrong, had wilfully taken the path of rebellion and defiance. In this respect her case represents that of every culpable transgressor. The end of the way of sin is death, is destruction without remedy. It is a stern truth, but it is a truth, and a truth which mercy reveals.

II. TO WHOM THE TURNING MUST BE. "Turn us unto *thee!*" Away from the sin which has misled, away from the human counsellors and helpers in whom is no wise counsel and no sufficient help, away from self, to God against whom the sinner has transgressed and to whom he needs to be reconciled. The old phrase, "conversion unto God," is one full of truth, meaning, and appropriateness.

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III. BY WHOM THE TURNING MUST BE EFFECTED. The prayer is unto the Lord; for he alone can turn the wanderer unto himself. By the authority of his Law, by the winning, melting power of his gospel, by the sweet constraint of his Spirit, he alone can transform the heart, reverse the steps, and renew the olden days of those who have transgressed but have now at length sought his favour and forgiveness.—T.

Ver. 2.—*The fate of inheritance and houses.* The Israelite reckoned a great deal on his inheritance, that which came to him as an Israelite; and in this he did quite right, seeing how he was bound to dwell on the promises made to Abraham. There was the national territory, sanctified and made a peculiarly valuable thing by the manner in which it first came into Israel's hand. Then there were the tribal inheritances and the family inheritances. So that altogether inheritance was continually before the Israelite mind; inheritance became almost a part of self. Doubtless many tracts of land had run down in the same families for generations. And now the foreigner comes in to reap the riches of these lands and dwell in the houses built on them. What the Israelites failed to recollect was that the inheritance they esteemed so much was not the real inheritance in the eyes of God. The visible land, out of which comes the corn, the wine, the oil, is only the type of that deeper, that truly exhaustless spiritual land, where we are to sow plentifully, assured that a harvest cannot fail. There is the inheritance, corruptible, defiled, that doth fade away. There is the house made with hands, temporal, on the earth. And then, all unconscious of the pains we are preparing for ourselves, we let our heart's best affections get round these things. The loss of the inheritance, the loss of the houses, was the way to gain, if only the loser could see it. Doubtless what we may fail to possess of temporal things some one else gets hold of; but his getting is not with a firm, abiding grasp. These lamenting Israelites would reckon that the loss of inheritance and houses, which made them so miserable, would make the new possessors correspondingly happy; and such would be the case for a time, but only so long as the brightness of the first delusion lasted. God does not mean that we should ever say of any really good thing that our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens. Of the really good things there is enough and to spare for all. Christ sends out his apostles to urge every one towards the inheritance of the saints in light; and in the house of him who is Father of Jesus and of all that believe in Jesus there are many mansions, many abiding-places, a place for every one wishing to dismiss the restless, craving spirit, and abide in such a place.—Y.

Ver. 7.—*The sin of the fathers and the suffering of the children.* This chapter is the complaint of those who suffer. "We," "us," "our,"—these are the prominent words. The complainers are those who have lost inheritance and houses, become fatherless, and entered into a galling servitude. And now what do they give as the reason of all this terrible experience? This—that "our fathers have sinned."

I. THE MEASURE OF TRUTH IN THIS. The fathers had sinned. That was an historical fact. The utterances of former prophets, recorded, perhaps, in far greater abundance than we have any idea of, attested the iniquities of past generations. No generation of which there was any record had been without its disobedience. And had it not also been said that the sins of the fathers should be visited on the children? Hence there is plain logic in these words, "Our fathers have sinned, . . . and *we* have borne their iniquities." Great is the suffering in bodily pain, in privation, and in emotion, of every generation; and each generation has a right to say that some, at all events, of this suffering would have been escaped if only preceding generations had lived according to the full law of righteousness. Hence the appeal to us, when self-indulgence presses with all its energies, to consider others. Indulging self, we have to make ready for after-pains; but those pains cannot be kept within the limit of our own lives.

II. True as this statement is, there is A MEASURE OF DEFECT IN IT. Note exactly how the point is put: "Our fathers have sinned, and are not;" that is, "they cannot suffer any more, and now the suffering comes on to us." In such an aspect of the situation there is great pathos, but we need to travel round to the other aspects also. There is a difference between retribution and suffering. Some kinds of pain and injury may be inherited to the third and fourth generation, but a guilty conscience belongs to the individual. The worst pains, the worst consequences, and those on which the Saviour looks

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with the most pity, are surely those coming out of our own wrong-doing; and searching into the connection between the sins of past generations and the suffering of the present one will do harm rather than good, if such a searching tends to obscure our own lawlessness, our own want of attention to the requirements of God. There is, indeed, a great difference in kind between the suffering coming on us from the wickedness of others and that which comes from our own.—Y.

Ver. 14.—*The occupation of the elders gone.* I. THE PLACE OF OLD MEN IN A COMMUNITY. As men grow old they may get past certain kinds of work, but they need not cease to be useful, nor need age become, unless from bodily frailty, a burden and a weariness. There is much for an old man to tell from the stores of his experience and observation. He may show what ought to be avoided, even if he cannot always tell what ought to be done. The elders sat in the gate, where the throng passed in and out, and where they could see more people probably than anywhere else. An old man should endeavour to be useful and to mingle with the life of the world as long as he can. It is right that he should be in the way of all the respect and veneration he can receive, not because these things are necessary to his happiness, but because those who give them are the better for their giving. A society without its troops of children at one end, full of life and eagerness, and its sprinkling of hoary heads crowned with glory at the other, would soon feel that very important elements were lacking. Elders sitting in the gate bore testimony to a certain stability and continuity in the social life of Jerusalem.

II. THE PECULIAR ASPECT OF THE CALAMITY FURNISHED BY THE FACT THAT THE OLD MEN HAVE FORSAKEN THE GATE. There is no longer anything to take them to the gate. Where of old they had many pleasures, now they will have nothing but pain. The place of honour would only become a place of insult, and in all likelihood only too many of these elders had been advisers of the wrong sort, men with a serene and firmly rooted confidence in their own opinion. To the warnings of a prophet old men can often reply that such things have been said over and over again without coming true; and then, when all at once the threatening takes effect, what can they do but retire into as much obscurity as possible? These same old men, many of them, must have had much to do with the state of affairs that made all these calamities a Divine necessity.—Y.

Ver. 16.—*Discrowned Jerusalem.* I. THE PAST HONOUR OF JERUSALEM. The crown has fallen from the head; a crown, therefore, has been upon the head. The lament is not over something striven for and not attained, but over something, as it seems, securely possessed and now irretrievably lost. Notice how Ezekiel is instructed to put the matter (xvi. 12). In making Jerusalem to know her abominations there is a contrast with former privileges. Jehovah says, "I put a beautiful crown upon thine head . . . and thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty." Unquestionably Jerusalem and the land of which she was the radiant centre shone forth gloriously among the Gentiles. The great example of this is that queen of the south who came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. God for his own purposes, inscrutable, and yet, as we must believe, beneficent, constituted it so that Jerusalem was like a fair woman crowned with a crown of pure gold. Other cities had their strength, glory, peculiarities, but Jerusalem was uniquely glorious. And so human individuals may have most attractive natural endowments. There may be physical beauty, or genius, or some ineffable charm of character, or great intellectual capacity, something that lifts man or woman above the common crowd, and thus puts upon them a bright and manifest natural crown. The same great secret power that glorified Israel glorifies men still, not for what they do, nor for any claim they have, but that in their glory they may stimulate and inspire others, and multiply the happiness of every life coming within their sway. It was for the sake of the nations that Jehovah glorified Jerusalem and made her beautiful.

II. HER PRESENT HUMILIATION. The crown has fallen from the head, but the mark of past and lost regality remains. It cannot be obliterated. The higher a nation climbs, the further it can fall and the more terrible becomes the spectacle of its fall. It needed all the slow and majestic ascent of Rome to greatness to make Gibbon's great book possible. Thus, looking from such a height, he had pathetic struggles and contrasts to depict, which would else have been impossible. So, also, we contemplate

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the aberrations and miseries, the cynicism and misanthropy coming out in the lives of geniuses who have missed their way, men of richest endowments who, from the depths of self-indulgence and debauchery, might well cry, "The crown is fallen from my head." And so we see that the great crown to be desired is, not that which comes through natural differences or differences in social position, but that which comes through the divinely inspired quality of one's living. "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness" (Phil. iv. 1; 2 Tim. iv. 8; Jas. i. 12; 1 Pet. v. 4).—Y.

Ver. 17.—*The faint heart and the dim eyes.* I. THE PENETRATING EFFECT OF THE DIVINE CHASTISEMENTS. Jerusalem had been satisfied with outward things. Wherever it turned, there had been enough to satisfy its pride and its pleasure. And now Jehovah, by efficient agents, had taken these outward things away. The difference that had been made in Jerusalem was perceptible to any eye. But another difference could only be known when it was confessed, namely, the difference made in the hearts of the people when their outward circumstances were so completely changed. Proud, resolute men, full of joy in their selfish purposes, found the interest of life completely gone. It would have availed nothing if all these chastisements had ended in leaving the people real Stoics, able to say that it was all the same whether they kept their temporal possessions or lost them. God did not desolate Jerusalem for any delight that he took in this; it was to find a way to humble hearts that were unsubdued after every prophetic appeal. When men are delightedly occupied with the things of sense, then it is a great end gained if, through losses and changes, their hearts become faint and their eyes dim. For then they may accept the ministry of Christ to put into their hearts an energy which will tend for righteousness and direct their eyes to look on the world in the right way.

II. THE CAUSE HERE SPECIALLY MENTIONED. The hill of Zion has become a desolation; it has become again a mere height in the wilderness, such as doubtless it had been at some time before in the immemorial past. That Zion is here specified seems to point to the sorrow and despair caused by the overthrow of religious ordinances. The very fact that Jehovah had allowed the place devoted to him to become thus desolated made his displeasure with the people to become a much more vivid thing. It seemed as if he needed no more a habitation in their midst.—Y.

Vers. 19—22.—*The only resource acknowledged to be in God.* It will be felt that this prayer is a fitting conclusion to the book. What could be more proper than that these people, having looked all *around* with an ever-deepening sense of loss and humiliation, should now look *above*? Upon earth, in strength or skill of man, there is nothing to be looked for; if anything is to be got, it is by looking to heaven.

I. AMID ALL THESE CHANGES THE CONTINUANCE OF JEHOVAH IS PERCEIVED. Zion has become desolate, but the true throne of God is not there. That God lives, unchangeable, unaffected by our lapses and losses, is the last safeguard of hope, and it is an impregnable one. Much is it to be desired that, amid all the vicissitudes of life, we should have this sense of something unchanging.

II. THE SENSE OF SEPARATION FROM GOD. This was the crown of troubles to some of the people, that God seemed to have forgotten them and forsaken them. But when God remembered them and manifested his presence, all that the people in general did was to take his gifts and think nothing of the Giver's will and purpose. God, of course, had neither forgotten nor forsaken. What the people called forgetting was only a different kind of remembering. What they called forsaking was only a closer presence.

III. THE UNQUENCHABLE HOPE OF THOSE WHO TAKE THE RIGHT VIEW OF GOD. This chapter has had in it the tones of penitence and contrition. It is admitted that the cause of all this desolation is the people's turning away from God. And now there is the petition which results from a full self-discovery. Inward weakness is discovered. The last cry of the book indicates that the turning of men to God is the great thing to be desired. Not a restoration to external possessions and comforts, but a turning to God consequent on his turning to us. The results that come from our being turned to God by his power will one day be seen to justify all the loss and pain needed to bring them about.—Y.

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HOMILETICAL INDEX

TO

THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH.

CHAPTER I.

THEME	PAGE
The Solitary City	3
Comfortless	4
The Abandoned Feasts	5
Her Beauty departed from Zion ...	5
Pleasant Things in the Days of Old ...	6
Sorrow unequalled, yet unheeded ...	7
Fourfold Trouble from God... ...	7
The Righteousness of God confessed...	8
The Contrasts of Adversity... ...	9
The Decline of National Religion ...	9
Mournful Memories	10
Spoliation and Profanation	10
Unparalleled Woe...	11
"The Lord is Righteous"	11
The Cry of the Contrite	12
Widowhood . . . the Emblem of Loneliness	12
Nights of Weeping explained ...	13
Zion forsaken as a Religious Centre ...	14
The Real Need of the Soul made manifest	14
The Observation of Suffering ...	15
The Acknowledgment that Suffering is deserved	16
A Wicked Gladness	16

CHAPTER II.

God not remembering his Footstool ...	19
The Lord as an Enemy	20
The Rejected Altar	20
"No Vision"	21
The Vision of Falsehood and Folly ...	22
The Triumph of the Foe	22
Ruin from God	23
A Cry to God in the Night Watches...	24
The Anger of the Lord	25
Retribution in Church and State ...	25
Law and Prophecy suspended ...	26
Commiseration	26
The Glory and Shame of Jerusalem ...	27
The Entreaty of Anguish	27
Consideration besought	27
The Manifestation of Jehovah's Wrath against Israel	28
Jehovah reckoned as an Enemy ...	28
The Prophetic Office suspended ...	29
The Silence of the Elders	30
The Suffering of the Children ...	30
The Share of the Prophets in ruining Jerusalem	31
The Completeness of Jehovah's Visitation	31

CHAPTER III.

"The Man that has seen Affliction" ...	35
"Dark Places"	36
Hedged about	37
Strength and Hope perished ...	38
God taking Notice of Man's Affliction	38
The Unceasing Mercies of God ...	39
The Secret of Hope	40

Digitized by Google

THEME	PAGE
Quiet Waiting	41
Youth	41
Chastisement only for a Season ...	42
How Evil and Good both proceed from God	43
Self-Examination	44
God covering himself with a Cloud ...	44
Tears which only God can wipe away	45
"Fear not!"	46
The Great Appeal	46
Afflicted by God	47
The Way of Life hedged and built up	48
Unheard Prayer	48
Prosperity forgotten	48
Remembering Affliction	49
Hope reviving	49
Sparing Compassion	50
"New every Morning"	50
The Portion of the Godly	51
Waiting for Salvation	51
The Yoke in Youth	52
The Cheek to the Smiter	52
Divine Benignity	52
The Source of Evil and of Good ...	53
Why murmur?	53
Repentance	54
"Sursum Corda!"	54
Sympathetic Sorrow	54
The Cry from the Dungeon... ...	55
Prayer heard and answered] ...	55
The Lord's Knowledge of his People's Sufferings and Wrongs	56
Righteous Recompense	56
The Sum of a Terrible Experience ...	57
How Hope rises from the Depths of Despair	57
The Unfailing Compassions of Jehovah	58
Those who have Jehovah for their Portion	58
God's Goodness to the Hopeful and the Patient	59
The Discipline of Youth	60
God's Good Purposes in causing Pain	60
Approaching God in Sincerity ...	61
The Eye and the Life	61
Jeremiah calling out of the Dungeon...	62
Jeremiah and his Enemies	62
The Music of the Wicked	63
The Principle of Retribution ...	63

CHAPTER IV.

THEME	PAGE
Fine Gold dimmed ...	67, 72
The Violation of Maternal Instincts ...	68
Reverses of Fortune	68
Incredible Calamities	69
Blindness	70
Contamination	71
The End of Punishment	71
"Precious Sons . . . Fine Gold . . . become Earthen Pitchers"	73
The Horrors of Famine	73
The Impregnable taken	73
The Degradation of the Prophets and the Priests	74
Vain Help and Hope	74
The End is come!	75
Fallen Reputation	75
Natural Affection gone	76
Social Revolution	76
The Sin of Sodom...	77
Sword and Hunger	77
A Seeming Impossibility achieved ...	78
Shedding the Blood of the Just ...	78
A Disappointed Confidence and a Desecrated Sanctity	79

CHAPTER V.

A Prayer of Distress	81
The Lost Inheritance	81
Orphanage and Widowhood	82
Children suffering for the Sins of their Parents	83
Consolation in the Supremacy of God	84
Questioning God	84
Renewal	85
The Lord's Remembrance besought ...	86
The Moral Continuity of Nations ...	86
None to Deliver	87
The Cessation of Joy	87
The Degradation of Sin	87
The Eternal Throne	88
"Turn us again!"	88
The Fate of Inheritance and Houses...	89
The Sin of the Fathers and the Suffering of the Children	89
The Occupation of the Elders gone ...	90
Discrowned Jerusalem	90
The Faint Heart and the Dim Eyes ...	91
The Only Resource acknowledged to be in God	91

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